MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

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"Promise to read to me the log of your last trip, when you went down the big river."

MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

OR

Solving the Mystery of the Thousand Islands

By

LOUIS ARUNDEL

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THE MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE;

or

Solving a Mystery of the Thousand Islands

CHAPTER I—AFTER THE GAME

"That was a hard game for Macklin to lose, fellows!"

"I should say it was, Herb."

"He nearly pitched his head off, too. Wow! how they did come in like cannon balls!"

"And talk about curves and drops, Little Clarence was roight there wid the goods," said a stout boy; whose freckled face, carroty hair and blue eyes, as well as the touch of brogue to his voice, told of Irish blood.

"But Jack met his hot pace, and went him one better. Clarence may be a cracker jack in the box, but he can't *just* come up to good old reliable Jack Storm ways, of the high school baseball club."

"Oh, shucks! enough of that taffy, fellows," laughed the object of this praise, as he swung the bat he was carrying; "why, you know right well I was up against the fence when they made that ninth inning rally. They had found me with the goods on. And you know who won that game for us—our never failing, heavy pinch-hitter, Buster Longfellow. When his bat got up against the horsehide I knew it was all over but the shouting for Clarence."

"Wasn't he mad, though? Hurrah for Buster! He's not built for a runner, they say, but he's got the batting eye. That hit was a peach!"

"Thanks, George. I believe I did help Brodie dash home with the winning tally. It's awful nice of you fellows to appreciate talent!"

The boy called Buster made a mock bow as well as he was able. He was fat and chunky, so that his baseball suit seemed moulded to his figure. While his name was understood to be Nick Longfellow, he seldom heard it save at home or in school. To his fellows he was known by such significant names as "Buster," "Pudding," and "Hippopotamus."

There were just five in the bunch, dusty, tired fellows, all on the way home from a most exciting game with a rival team, and the most bitter rivals for supremacy in the little river town along the upper Mississippi.

Besides Buster and Jack, there were the Irish lad, Jimmie Brannagan, who lived with the Stormways, being something of a ward of Jack's father; Herb Dickson, and George Rollins, all of them members of the high school team.

These five boys, with the addition of another who was not present just then, composed the membership of a motor boat club, and between them owned three very clever craft. George's was a narrow speedboat, called the *Wireless*, the powerful engine of which had a faculty for getting out of order just when most wanted. The one of which Jack was skipper was named the *Tramp*, and while not so fast as its dangerous competitor, could still make great time. Herb possessed a commodious launch, which he had very wisely christened the *Comfort*, for she was as staunch and reliable as a houseboat.

During the preceding autumn, taking advantage of the school being closed until New Year's because of an epidemic in the town, these boys had made a long trip down the Mississippi river to New Orleans, being given permission by their parents or guardians.

To make the run more interesting Jack's father had contributed a silver cup as a trophy; and the annals of that adventurous race have already been given in the first volume of this series. The boys for some time had been laying their heads together and planning another outing for the coming vacation; but for various good and sufficient reasons they were keeping their intended cruising ground a dead secret from everybody.

"Where's Josh Purdue?" asked Herb, as the party swung into the main street of the town. "We want him along when we talk over that letter Jack had from Clayton, where our boats are going. What did you do about hiding their destination, Jack?"

"Yes," said George, quickly. "You know we agreed that those chaps were nosing all about, trying to get a clew. Clarence has ordered a rattling motor boat from some eastern maker, and if he could only learn where we're going to hang out this summer, wouldn't he just try to make it warm for us, though? Ten to one you hadn't left the station five minutes after fastening on the tags before he was reading the same."

"I expected that, fellows," laughed Jack, "and did the best I could to fool him. The boats are only sent to the address in Milwaukee. From there they will be rebilled to Clayton and shipped on a steamer through the lakes."

"But he might even have the nerve to write to that agent and make some

excuse for asking where they were sent. How about that, Jack?" asked Herb.

"I even thought of that," replied the other. "You see, when you're dealing with wide-awake, unscrupulous fellows like Clarence Macklin, and his toady, Joe Brinker, it pays to insure against trouble. And I've done it as well as I knew how."

"Tell us about it, please," asked Buster, anxiously.

"Well," replied the one addressed, "I wrote the agent in Milwaukee, stating the circumstances. He turned out to be a jolly good chap; for he answered me and promised that if Clarence or Joe make inquiries he'll put them on the wrong track."

"Bully for him!" ejaculated Nick. "We'll vote him thanks at our next meeting, fellows, that's what, and call on him in a body as we go through to the steamer when on our way."

"I wish the time was two weeks later," remarked Herb. "I don't see just how I'm going to stand it until after the exams are over."

"Oh, well, the days manage to pass along; and this glorious victory ought to make you feel that life is worth living," remarked Jack, with mock seriousness.

"As for me," remarked Buster, taking in a long breath, as if in anticipation. "I just dream of the bliss of cruising aboard a steady, roomy boat like the *Comfort*. You can talk all you want, George, about the delights of flying through the water at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour; but me to the cozy home-like cruiser every time. Once is out for me, you remember."

"Do we, boys?" jeered George, looking at the rest. "Well, will I ever forget how Buster used to sit there in the stern of my flier, looking like a stuffed pillow, with a cork life preserver belted around him all the time, and trying to keep his balance. And the less said about his cooking the better. It haunts me still."

"Oh! but I've improved in that respect, George, very much," the fat boy hastened to exclaim. "Don't you worry about it, Herb. I'm taking lessons from our colored cook right now, and expect to branch out as a real prize box. You know when I once set my mind to a thing I generally get there, even if it does take time. Great bodies move slowly, they say. Didn't I learn to swim after all my disappointments; tell me that, George Rollins?"

"Sure you did, thanks to Jack here," replied the other. "But all through that trip you gave me the nightmare because you had lost some silly——"

"Hold on! you solemnly promised you'd never say another word about that business and I'm going to keep you to it, George," cried Buster. "We did have a glorious time of it, you know. And I can do a little once in a while to help the crowd forget their troubles, can't I?"

"Why, to be sure you can, Buster, and I'm the last one to deny it," declared

George. "I don't mean half I say. You know my weakness is a quick tongue. And after the grand way you belted that ball today, I'd be willing to forgive almost anything you'd ever done. Shake on that, old partner of my joys and woes."

"The boats got off all right, that's a comfort," observed Herb.

"How do ye know?" demanded Jimmie.

"I saw them on the cars, and moving out of town, just in that ninth inning, when things looked so black for us," was the reply. "You know my position out in right gives me a chance to look across the big field to the railroad. And as I was getting my breath, after chasing that tricky ball Carson Beggs whacked out, with two on bases, I had a glimpse of a freight passing, and counted all three boats on gondolas, fastened up in their waterproof covers. It just seemed to give me heart to go in and root harder than ever. It was a lucky omen, too, fellows."

"Well," Jack said, "of course they'll be waiting for us at Clayton when we get there. And although we talked of taking the steamer ourselves, I think, on the whole, it would be wise to go by train. In that way we'll save a couple of days. Besides, some time we mean to cruise all through the great lakes, and we'd better keep the trip until we can do it in our own motor boats."

"That sounds good to me!" cried Nick.

"And I'm sure it hits my case to a dot, because it means less time to wait," and Herb nodded his head in a way that plainly told how his mind was made up.

"That settles the lake trip, then," laughed George, "because I never did care much about going that way. Jimmie, how do you stand on it?"

"Wid both feet," replied the party addressed, emphatically. "The sooner we kin arroive at the Thousand Islands, the better I'll be plazed."

"Oh! well, let's forget we ever mentioned going the other way," said Jack. "But that won't prevent our passing through Milwaukee, stopping to shake hands with that obliging agent, and finding if the boats got off all right."

"You can learn that by writing in a few days, Jack," observed Herb, sagaciously. "I only hope Clarence doesn't have a friend in Milwaukee who would spy around and discover the truth, that's all."

"If he writes the agent you can make up your mind he hasn't," said Nick, as the party came to a pause on a corner, where, as a rule, they were accustomed to separating, each one heading for his own home.

"Wait a little, boys. I think I see Josh coming away back there," remarked Jack, when one of the others made some remark about "seeing you later, fellows!"

"Looks like he was in a big hurry, too?" suggested Nick.

"Well, he is half running, to be sure," admitted George.

"And there he goes waving his hand to us," mentioned Herb. "I guess Josh

wants us to wait up for him here. Perhaps he's got something to tell us."

"Or it may be he just wants to wring the hand of our friend Buster, and tell him, with tears in his eyes, how delighted he was to have him save the day for our team," and Jack, as he said this, winked at George; for it was a notorious fact that Josh and the fat boy were forever playing pranks on each other, and often saying disagreeable things; that, however, ended in nothing harder than a little froth and bubble, since it was only surface and make-believe animosity after all.

"Don't you believe it," declared the hero of the late game, shaking his head in an aggressive way. "Josh was the next batter up, and I just know he thinks I swatted that ball to cheat him out of the glory. For he had his mind made up to send the horsehide over the fence for a home run."

"Well," laughed Jack, "never wait to see what the next batter is going to do. When the chance comes you just poke that ball out into deep center, and then roll down to first as fast as you can. Then perhaps he'll bring you home with his big hit. But Josh is getting here, and we'll soon know now what ails him."

"Don't you go to borrowing trouble too soon?" warned Herb. "I know Josh pretty well, and how he likes to joke. He's a false alarm, that's what."

"But he looks serious enough right now," said George, with whom the runner was to keep company on this new cruise they had planned; and who, therefore, felt an especial interest in Josh.

The newcomer was a rather slender fellow, taller than any of the others, and the best runner on the team. In times past Josh had been troubled with indigestion; but the month and more spent during their memorable Mississippi cruise had about cured him of this, so that he was looking better than ever before in all his life. That was one reason why his parents were only too glad to allow him the chance of getting in the open again during the coming vacation; for they believed it would be the making of the lad.

Josh stopped running when close to the others, as though husbanding his wind so that he could communicate the news he bore.

"It's all up, fellows!" he cried, as he finally reached the corner, where the other five gathered around him.

"What do you mean?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"Yes, explain, Josh. What's up?" demanded George.

"They know where our boats have gone!" gasped Josh, excitedly. "Somebody must have leaked, that's what. And they're going to have their new motor boat shipped to the Thousand Islands, too. Now, see what a peck of trouble we're going to have this summer!"

CHAPTER II—CHUMS, TRIED AND TRUE

"Josh, hold up your hand, and look me in the eye!" said Jack, sternly.

"Oh! you don't believe me, do you? But I never was more serious in my life!" exclaimed the newcomer, meeting Jack's look squarely.

"Then I'm sorry, that's all," declared the other. "If Clarence Macklin has found out where we expect to cruise this summer, he'll lie awake nights trying to lay plans how to give us all the trouble he can."

"How d'ye know all this, Josh?" demanded Nick, rather tremulously.

"I just happened to be near where Clarence and Joe were having their heads together, and the idea came to me to listen. I only thought they were explaining how the game was lost, and I wanted to hear Clarence say how somebody sent a ray of sunlight into his eyes with a pocket mirror, just when he was handing out that ball Buster knocked out in deep center. You know his way, fellows, and how he squirms out of every hole so smoothly?"

"Yes, yes, of course we do, Josh; but go on;" cried Herb.

"Don't you see you've got us keyed up to the breaking pitch? Let loose, and tell what you heard!" exclaimed George, always nervous and anxious to make speed.

"Well, it wasn't much, but it counted for a heap," replied the narrator. "About as near as I can remember, and repeat, this was what Clarence said: 'Never mind, Joe, we're going to get even soon. Wait till our dandy boat gets to Clayton. Say, mebbe there won't be a lot of surprised fellows then, as we cut circles around 'em, and make 'em wish they hadn't blackballed us. You wait and see, that's all.'"

Various exclamations broke out from the other boys.

"Oh, yes, they must know, all right!" said Herb, bitterly.

"All I can say is it's mighty queer, after we've taken such pains to keep

everything a dead secret, so even our folks don't know yet where we're going," Josh continued to say, meaningly.

Somehow or other, as if by mutual arrangement, every eye seemed to be gradually focussed on poor Nick, who turned as red as a turkey cock.

"Oh! yes, look at me, won't you?" he exclaimed, spluttering more or less as was his habit when unduly excited. "You think I'm the one who leaked, just because I stopped to talk with Clarence the other day on the street, and George saw me. He never even said a single word about boats, but asked me something else. Look all you want too, but I tell you, once for all, that if there *was* a leak, it didn't come through me! I never told a single soul!"

"Oh! nobody has accused you, Buster," said Jack, soothingly, for he was fond of the good-natured fat boy.

"That's all right, but I guess I've got feelings, and I can tell what every one of you is thinking," the other went on, in an aggrieved tone.

"Just forget it, Buster," Jack continued, for he knew only too well how the fat boy liked to harp on anything that worried him, and in this way make life miserable for the others of the club. "The mischief is done. Like as not we may never know how it happened. And there's no need of our bothering our heads now about spilt milk. The question is, shall we change our plans, and go somewhere else this summer?"

"I say no!" exclaimed Herb, immediately and with firmness.

"That's my case, too," Josh echoed. "After we've made all our fine arrangements, it would be cowardly to back down just because those two mean skunks choose to tag after us and try to give us trouble."

"Niver give up the ship! Thim's my sintiments!" observed Jimmie, aggressively. "And I say the same," remarked Nick. "Sooner or later you'll find out how they learned our plans, and then you'll all be sorry for putting it on me, that's what."

"Then it seems settled that we make no change," said Jack, with a stern look on his face; "for I'm of the same opinion as the rest. We'll go to the St. Lawrence, and if Tricky Clarence and Bully Joe try to upset our plans, they'll find themselves barking up the wrong tree, that's all."

"And so he thinks he's got a wizard boat that will cut circles all around my *Wireless*, does he?" said George, with the light of anticipated rivalry in his black eyes. "All right. Perhaps Clarence has got another guess coming. He'll find me on the job all right, and ready to give him a warm run for his money."

"When did we start talking seriously for the first time about choosing the Thousand Islands, and the St. Lawrence for our summer outing?" asked Herb, who

seemed almost as anxious as Nick to find out the truth concerning the leak.

"I can tell you that," replied the fat boy, quickly. "It was that afternoon when Jack asked us to stay after school, and meet him in the clubroom for a little talk. Don't you remember, he read that letter he had from Clayton, the first one; and we soon voted to make the St. Lawrence our cruising ground this summer."

"Buster is right about that, for I remember it distinctly," remarked Jack.

"That was the little room in school that Mr. Sparks allows the various clubs and organizations to use when they ask permission—the one on the second floor? Am I right, fellows?" Herb went on.

"Sure ye arre," declared Jimmie. "Doan't I just remember that we wint till the door ivery two minutes to say if the inemy would be sphyin' around in the hall."

"But there was no sign of them, you also remember that?" observed Jack, quickly.

"Niver a wan," Jimmie hastened to reply.

"Then it would stand to reason that they didn't overhear us talking. I know you couldn't in the next room, for I've been in there during recitation, and the wall is dead. I only mention this, because that same day, after I left the rest of you down-town, I found that I'd forgotten a book I needed to study, and hurried back to the school. And I met Clarence coming along the street. He said he had been kept in by Miss Stryker to do a task. But it looks as though the leak could not have been at that time."

"Somebody must have talked in their sleep," suggested Josh, humorously.

"Perhaps some one in the post office got on to Jack receiving a letter from Clayton, and writing there," Herb put in.

"Well, now," remarked Jack, "there may be something in that idea; though just now I can't think of anybody in the post office who would be that mean. I know all the clerks, and none of them have ever been thick with either Clarence or Joe."

"Suppose we give the matter a rest," said Herb, with an uneasy look toward Nick; for the fat boy was to be his partner during the coming cruise, and he feared lest Buster would get to brooding on the unjust suspicions that had been directed toward him, with the result that he must be forever speaking about it, and suggesting the most astonishing explanations of the riddle.

"Agreed," Jack replied, readily, falling in with the idea. "After all, the coming of these fellows may add some spice to our trip, who knows."

It certainly did, as will be made manifest shortly; but just then none of the motor boat boys suspected what a strange series of exciting adventures was

to be their portion, all through the decision of their rivals to choose the same cruising grounds for their summer outing, and to be as malicious and troublesome as possible.

Nick seemed to have thrown aside the temporary gloom that had fallen upon him, because of the unjust suspicions of his mates. He was naturally so cheery that trouble and he could never hitch up together for any great length of time.

"If those two cronies do chase after us," he said, "perhaps the long standing trouble between Joe and myself may be settled. You know we've been growling at each other for going on a year now. And some day there'll be a surprise due him."

When Nick talked in that vein the others knew he was himself again, and ready to joke. So Jack, pretending to be surprised, went on to remark:

"Why, Buster, do you mean to say you'd pick on that poor fellow, who has never been able to whip more than three boys at a time in all his life? I'm surprised to hear you talk so savagely."

"Oh! well, the thing is brooding, and bound to come off some day. Bully Joe will go just a little too far, and get his. Why, there was one time, not so long ago either, when I'd just about made up my mind to lick him for keeps. And I give you my word, fellows, I'd have wiped up the ground with him, only that I was grabbed from behind and held back!"

"Wow! listen to the war chief, would you?" exclaimed Josh, pretending to shrink away from the belligerent fat boy, who was doubling up his pudgy fists, and assuming a warrior's pose.

"He's sure got on his fighting togs today!" echoed Herb, soothingly.

"Say, Buster," remarked George, when Jack nudged him in the side, "tell us who was so mean as to grab you that way, and hold you back!"

"Shucks! I just knew you'd never rest till you asked that!" cried the other, as he pretended to show disgust. "Why, that was Joe, don't you see!"

At that there was a howl; and Jimmie doubled up like a jack-knife in the violence of his merriment.

"I can see Joe's finish, if he keeps on trying such tricks," whooped George.

"Oh!" Buster went on, in a calm manner, "I'll try and be as easy with him as any one could expect. Perhaps after he's had one good lesson, Joe may reform. It's keeping bad company that's been his downfall. Clarence Macklin has oodles of money; and his dad used to be a sporty sort of a Wall street man they say, when he lived east; so he don't care much what his hopeful does, so long as he keeps out of jail."

"Well, if he goes on much longer the way he has, I reckon he'll land there

after a bit," Herb remarked, soberly; for he had suffered on several occasions at the hands of the vindictive Clarence, as was well known to his chums.

"All right," Jack put in. "And now, if there's nothing further before the house, I move we adjourn. For one I know I'm as hungry as a bear, and ready to tackle a good dinner after all that hot work on the diamond."

"Dinner!" exclaimed Buster, whose one weak point lay in his love of eating. "Wow! don't you remember what bully good meals we had when we all got together on that dandy Mississippi trip, and Josh here slung the pots and pans? He's sure the best cook in seven counties. I hear he's getting up a book on camp dinners. And right now I subscribe for the first copy that's printed; if it don't cost over ten cents."

"Just you wait," returned Josh, with one of his wide grins. "It won't be long now before you'll have to get up and hustle the tin pans and things, whenever you have that longing for grub steal over you. No sitting down to the table and cleaning up everything in sight for you then. It's work before you can eat. Herb is going to keep you down to brass tacks, ain't you Herb?"

"Oh! Buster and myself expect to get on first rate," the one addressed hastened to say; for Herb was a lover of peace. "I'm ready to pitch in and help him out on occasion. Everything is going to be lovely, and the goose hang high, aboard the good, staunch old *Comfort*, when we sail the stormy waters of the St. Lawrence, eh, Buster?"

"Well," remarked Josh, as he started away, "anyhow, I'm glad you've decided to give our friend Buster the upper berth!"

A shout followed after him, and the last glimpse he had of the fat boy, Buster was shaking both fists in his direction, and pretending to display tremendous rage, though secretly chuckling with good-natured laughter. Happy the boy who is so constituted that he can in the best of humor take a joke that is leveled at himself; and that was Nick Longfellow to a dot.

The rest of the bunch soon scattered, as their homes lay in various directions; and this particular corner usually served as a gathering point as well as the place where they separated.

Jack may have allowed the mystery of the suspected "leak" to crop up in his active mind from time to time after that; but he knew just how sensitive Buster really felt over it, and he always religiously refrained from ever introducing the subject.

Some of the other boys of course must have discussed it as the days slowly passed; but they too seemed desirous that their fat chum might not have his feelings further injured, and nothing was said in his presence. But all the same Buster

did not forget, as Herb was fated to learn to his sorrow.

CHAPTER III—A CHANCE CLEW

"Why, hello Jack!"

It was the first day of vacation, and being at the tail end of the week, the motor boat club had wisely decided to defer their departure until the following Monday morning, when they would say goodbye to the home town, and start across the state for Milwaukee.

The speaker was no other than Clarence Macklin; and Jack had come face to face with his bitter enemy upon the main street of the town, as he passed out from a shop where he had been making a little purchase.

Clarence was smiling, after his usual manner; but there was always something crafty about this look of his that made most boys suspicious. Had he been given his choice in the matter Jack would have passed on with a mere nod; for he did not believe in pretending to show anything like friendliness toward this tricky lad, who had once tried to get into the motor boat club, and been blackballed, a fact he had vowed to get even for if it took him a year.

But Clarence evidently had a reason for wishing to talk with the other. He even thrust himself squarely in Jack's way; and the latter saw no reason why he should avoid an encounter.

"Well," continued Clarence, "I suppose you fellows are in high feather, now that vacation has come, and you can break away?"

"Sure we are," replied Jack, trying to seem good-natured; though secretly he was wondering what the other had concealed up his sleeve, and why he insisted on stopping him in this way; for it happened that just a day or so before Jack had been reading that good old precept of warning, to "Beware of the Greeks bearing gifts."

"And I suppose, also, you mean to get away soon?" Clarence went on.

"Monday sees us off, unless something we don't look for detains us," was Jack's response, as he watched the play of emotions on the face of the other, and noted how the pretense of friendliness was fading away.

"Well," Clarence suddenly burst out with, "I just wanted to let you know what me and Joe Brinker think of your sly trick in finding out where we meant to go this summer, and then arranging to copy after us! It was just what I'd expect such low-down sneaks as Herb Dickson and George Rollins to do; but I am surprised to know how you fell in with such a dirty game, that's what!"

Really, Jack never had a greater shock in all his life than when Clarence said this. It seemed to almost take his very breath away.

"Now, do you know, Clarence," he said, steadily, watching that sarcastic face, "the shoe seems to be on the other foot with us. To tell the truth, we've been believing all this time that you'd copied after us. In fact, poor Buster has been suspected of giving our secrets away, not intentionally, of course, just because he was seen talking with you. Queer, ain't it, how great minds often run in the same channel; and both of us thought of going to the St. Lawrence this summer."

"Aw! now you're just trying to crawl out of a hole," the other sneered. "But you needn't think you can spoil our summer fun for us, if you are six to two. I told my dad about it, and he advised me to go on, regardless. Just make up your minds to keep clear of Joe and me, if you know what's good for you!"

Even while the other was saying this there suddenly flashed upon Jack's mind the true reason for his being held up in this way by "Tricky Clarence," as young Macklin had come to be known among the boys of the town.

He wanted to rub it into Jack, and exult in the consternation which he expected his declaration would cause in the other's mind. But there was undoubtedly something more than this. If trouble did follow the meeting of the rivals among the many channels of the Thousand Islands, Clarence wished to make it appear that he and Joe were the aggrieved parties, and that they had been actually set upon by the members of the motor boat club, who had a grudge against them of long standing.

It was a clever bit of sharp practice, worthy of a shyster lawyer. Perhaps Clarence may have inherited some of the shifty trickery by which his respected father had laid the foundation to his big fortune in the wilds of Wall street.

But Jack had no desire to stand there and enter into a wordy war with Clarence, who had a ready tongue, and never cared very much where it led him.

So instead of taking up the challenge, as Clarence doubtless wanted him to, Jack simply elevated his eyebrows, and remarked:

"Oh! is that so? Well, I'm going to tell you just one thing for good and

all, Clarence. Neither myself, nor any one of the club, want to set eyes on you or Joe; and if it rests with us, we'll not run across each other all summer. But, understand me," and his eyes flashed dangerously, "we mean to strike back, and if there's trouble it will have to be of your seeking. You can have all you want of it. Now, that's enough. I'm done talking."

Clarence hardly knew what to say. He looked at the other as though tempted to blurt out the ugly things he had passing through his mind. But somehow he realized that it would not be safe pressing Jack Stormways too far. He was not the fighter Bully Joe had always been; for as a rule he managed to get some one else to carry out his battles for him. And Jack looked really dangerous just then.

"Pooh! words come cheap with some fellows," he muttered, as he turned away. "But you'll find they cut no figure with my partner and me. As to our keeping away from any particular spot you chumps choose to patronize, that for your silly warning," and he derisively snapped his fingers, for he was now twenty feet away.

Jack held himself in with an effort. He felt in a humor to have given the exasperating Clarence the drubbing he deserved; but it would hardly be nice to create such a disturbance of the public peace so soon before they expected to leave home. If it seemed fated that he must teach this contemptible fellow the lesson he so richly deserved it might be wise to wait until they were far away from the town where they lived.

He was looking after the departing Clarence when he saw him take out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead, for the day was warm.

Something fell to the ground, something that, even at that distance reminded Jack of a yellow telegram blank. He could just as well walk from the sporting goods store in the direction Clarence had gone as any other way. And it was his full intention to call after the other, if the paper seemed worth while.

So, in this spirit Jack bent down and secured possession of the crumpled yellow paper.

Just as he had expected it was a telegraph blank, written on but not signed. It seemed to be a message that some one had started, and upon making a mistake in the wording had crammed in his pocket while he started afresh.

That some one, of course, could only be Clarence, since the paper had fallen to the ground at the time he took out his handkerchief.

Ordinarily Jack would not have been guilty of looking at a telegraph message that had come into his possession under such circumstances. It seemed excusable now. Clarence was a secret enemy, and had been plotting to make trouble for the members of the motor boat club that had declined to allow him and Bully

Joe membership.

And the very first glimpse he had of the writing gave him a thrill; for he read the address, which was:

"Jared Fullerton, Clayton, N. Y."

On the spur of the moment Jack changed his mind. Instead of calling out after the departing Clarence, and notifying him that he had dropped something, Jack just crammed the yellow paper in his pocket, and wheeling, strode away.

He was considerably excited, and eager to learn what sort of communication the other could be sending to Clayton that required the use of the wires. And as he walked hurriedly away, with his nerves on edge, he half expected to hear Clarence shouting after him, demanding the return of his property.

"I never would be guilty of doing such a thing," Jack was saying to himself, on account of the mean feeling he had, "only that sometimes it's just necessary to fight fire with fire. If I'm wrong in my suspicions then there's no harm done. But I must know what he's telegraphing to Clayton. Who Jared Fullerton is I don't know from Adam; but I bet he's cut from the same pattern Clarence and Joe were."

By then Jack had turned a corner. Unable to withstand the temptation any longer, he looked around to make sure Clarence was not in sight; and then drawing out the crumpled piece of paper, read what had been written on the blank.

"Glad to hear boat arrived, and is such a corker. I'm bringing that hundred with me, and hope you've earned it before we arrive. Don't get in trouble for——"

Apparently Clarence did not like the way that last sentence looked, for he had started to change it several times. Then, thinking he had better write the whole message over again, he had doubtless thrust the first draft into his pocket, and entirely forgotten it.

Jack read it over twice, and looked grave.

"Now what that snake's up to, I'd give something to know," he said to himself, as he started to walk on, after placing the message away in his pocket. "Some sort of dirty scheme has been mentioned in a letter, and he's meaning to pay this Fullerton for doing the thing. What could it be? He says it's to be done before he and Joe get there. A hundred dollars is a lot of money. Oh! I wonder could he mean to have this other scamp injure our boats in some way?"

It was a dreadful suspicion that beset him right then. How easy for any one to put a lighted match to the canvas tarpaulins that covered the three boats on the steamer's dock at Clayton. Why, they might be either entirely ruined, or else so badly injured as to be useless for the whole season.

Would Clarence be equal to conspiring to do such a serious thing as this? Jack was sorry to admit that he believed the other was not past it in the least. He

had known him to play pranks that savored of the criminal before now; and it had always been his rich father's money and influence that had saved Clarence from getting the punishment he so richly deserved.

Obeying a sudden inspiration Jack turned and chased back to the railroad station where the telegraph office was located. He knew that the strict orders of the operating company would prevent his seeing the message that Clarence had finally given in, unless they were compelled to show it by a decree of the court. But Jack had no desire to go that deeply just then.

He knew the operator quite well, a young fellow who also sold tickets.

"Clarence Macklin was in here sending a message to Clayton, New York, wasn't he, Bert?" he asked, trying not to appear at all excited.

"Yes, that's so, Jack," came the reply from the agent; who was really an admirer of the young high school pitcher.

"How long ago was that—could I find him in town now, do you think?"

Note how cleverly this question was framed; and the operator fell into the trap without even a suspicion that he was yielding up valuable information.

"I reckon you might," he said, promptly, "because he went out of here not more than fifteen minutes ago, after sending his message. Start on Monday, I hear, Jack? Well, I only wish I was along. You fellows do have the best times going; while some of the rest of us have to keep our noses to the grindstone. Good luck to you all, and a bully trip on the river," for Jack, having picked up all the information he wanted, had turned abruptly on his heel and was leaving the station.

That settled it, then. Clarence had sent a message to the unknown Jared Fullerton, that was presumably along the same lines as the one he had first started. And doubtless that individual would be only too glad to try and earn his hundred-dollar fee before Clarence and Joe arrived.

Since none of the motor boat boys would be in Clayton to be injured, the only way in which he could do anything would be to scheme to bring some miserable catastrophe upon the precious motor boats that had arrived and were waiting to be claimed by their young owners at the steamboat docks.

It was surely a time for quick thinking, and action, unless they wished to take the chances of having their whole summer outing spoiled.

And Jack, as he hurried home, was laying out a plan of campaign in his mind calculated to outwit the miserable plotting of the reckless Clarence and his equally unscrupulous crony, Bully Joe.

CHAPTER IV—BLOCKING A SLY MOVE

"Is that you, Jack?"

"No other. Say, George, can you come over here at once?" asked the boy who was at the other end of the telephone wire; and there was that in his voice to arouse the interest of George Rollins to fever heat.

"Why, sure I can. My wheel is handy, and you'll see me drop in on you inside of a jiffy. But what's the row, Jack; no bad news about our boats I hope? They haven't been dropped overboard in the middle of Lake Erie, and sunk?"

"Oh, nothing half so bad; but I must see you," Jack went on saying. "And George, start some of the rest along too, won't you?"

"Buster and Josh are on my way, and if they're home I'll jolly both into coming. But you'd better try to poke out Herb over the wire," came the reply.

"I will. So-long, George. Get a move on you now. Important!"

Then Jack put up the receiver, to sever connection; although a moment later he was asking Central to give him the Dickson house. By great good luck Herb happened to be up in his den, doing some packing; for this was the last day he would have at home saving Sunday, and he was a very careful fellow.

After hearing the "call of the wild," as Jack expressed it, Herb consented to head for the Stormways domicile without any delay. He, too, made use of his wheel to cover the intervening distance; and quite a bunch of boys drew up in the yard about the same time.

Jack and Jimmie met them at the side door.

"Now, what under the sun has he got hold of, fellows?" queried George, nervously, as they filed up to Jack's snug den; for the serious expression on the faces of Jack and Jimmie gave him considerable concern.

Nick was puffing like a steam engine. The little rush had winded him more

or less; but at the same time he also looked anxious. For, as they were on the eve of starting out on their anticipated summer vacation, this sudden summons to headquarters gave him a shock.

"I only hope it ain't anything about the boats," he remarked plaintively, as he dropped down in a capacious chair that just suited his stout figure to a dot, and was hence invariably appropriated by Buster every time he came to see Jack.

"Well," remarked Jack, "I might as well admit right in the start that it does concern our three motor boats."

"Don't tell me that any tragedy has happened to 'em, Jack?" pleaded George, who was known to have a great affection for his *Wireless*, even though the cranky speed boat did seem to delight in playing many cruel tricks upon its skipper.

"No, not yet, I believe," came the answer.

"Good! You make me feel better already, Jack!" exclaimed George.

"But hold on!" cried Herb; "you noticed that he said 'not yet,' didn't you, boys? Don't you see what that means? The boats are in danger; ain't that so, Jack?"

"I've pretty good reason to believe so," replied the owner of the den; and then he whipped out the crumpled telegraph blank. "Here, read that, fellows, and tell me what you think. It fell from the pocket of Clarence Macklin not half an hour ago. And I understand that he sent off a message along these lines, after he had changed the wording a little."

Eagerly four heads were clustered above the yellow paper which he had smoothed out on the chess table. Clarence wrote a plain hand, so that there was no trouble in making out every word.

"Well, wouldn't that knock you?" gasped Nick, who had as yet failed to entirely recover his wind after his quick passage on his wheel to Jack's home, followed by the climb up two lights of stairs to the attic den.

"Jack, you're right; he means our boats!" ejaculated Herb, with a trace of indignation and horror in his voice.

"Oh! the miserable skunk, what wouldn't I give for the fun of punching his head for him. Just wait, the chance will come some fine day. Let them dare do anything to my bully little *Wireless*! Why, Jack, they could be sent to prison for a long term if they destroyed the boats."

Of course that was Skipper George, whose father being a lawyer, visions of the stern hand of justice were always cropping up in the boy's mind.

"The way I look at it is this," Josh went on, deliberately; "Clarence has a crony in Clayton, some fellow he knows by the name of Jared Fullerton. Seems to me I've heard him mention that name, too, though I don't remember anything

about him. But he's meaning to hire this chap to do something worth an even hundred. Fellows, we can give a quick guess that something has to do with our three boats, which by now must be lying on the steamboat dock there, waiting for us to arrive."

"You hit the nail on the head that time, Josh," declared Jack. "And I've asked you all to come here so we could talk the matter over, and decide what ought to be done."

An animated discussion followed. Some suggested one thing, which was debated *pro* and *con*; then another new idea would crop up, which they eagerly seized upon, being deeply concerned about the safety of the precious craft.

"Whatever do you suppose that sneak of a Fullerton could do, to put our craft out of the running?" asked Nick, finally.

"Well, he might accidentally drop a lighted match under the tarpaulin cover of one. You know it would flame up pretty quick, and might set the whole bunch going like a pack of fire-crackers," Josh observed.

"Well, I hardly think any one would take such chances at that," Jack remarked; "because, you see, they are lying on a public dock, and if a big fire resulted it would mean the penitentiary for Jared. But no matter, if a fellow only happened to be mean enough he could find lots of ways to injure boats like ours. And for one, I don't propose to take the chances."

"Tell us your plan, Jack; we'll stand by you," cried Buster.

"All right," said the other, quickly; "then listen. I propose that George and myself go and see his father, and ask his advice. You fellows make yourselves at home here; and after we've got things going we'll come back to report. How does that strike you?"

"I say yes!" Josh hastened to cry.

As the others were of the same mind, Jack and George hurried away. It being Saturday morning, George knew that his father would not be very busy at his law office and could easily spare them a little time.

They found Judge Rollins without any client, which Jack considered lucky, since haste was an element in their calculations just now. And after he had heard the whole story, scanned the incriminating telegraph blank, and asked numerous questions, the lawyer smiled, and said he was ready to give his advice.

"Here is the address of a party I know in Clayton, and whose name just came to me while you were talking, Jack," he observed. "Try and get him on the long distance phone, and explain the circumstances to him as you have to me. I feel sure that if you can reach Amos Spofford everything will be all right."

Accordingly the two lads immediately hustled around to the central station

of the telephone company, where they could use the long distance phone to better advantage than in a drug-store.

Having the local number of the party to whom the judge had referred them, Jack, who had taken it upon himself to do the talking, because George was apt to get excited, and splutter in a way that might interfere with the carrying of his message to such a long distance, asked to be connected with the Clayton office.

Of course, there was more or less delay, as usual, and the two boys became quite nervous before there finally came a faint call.

When Jack learned that it was really Mr. Spofford who was at the other end of the wire, he started to explain that it was Judge Rollins who had told the boys to get in touch with the Clayton man.

Then as briefly as possible, for time was valuable, he told about the trouble, and what they feared might happen. Happily, the man to whom he was talking seemed capable of seizing on facts, and building a plan of campaign instantly.

"Telegraph the agent of the steamboat Company to let me have the boats. I happen to know him very well—his name is James Matthews. Then forget all about the matter, boys. Depend on me! Your boats will be guarded, day and night, every minute of the time until you arrive. That is all. Goodbye!"

"Hurrah for Amos!" exclaimed George when his chum had related what the man in Clayton had said. "He's all to the good! That was a bright thought of yours, Jack, when you suggested going to ask my father's advice!"

"But let's get back to the others," laughed Jack, as they paid the bill and left the telephone office; "for they'll be burning up with anxiety to know what's going on."

"Yes," grinned George, now as happy and light-hearted as he had previously been gloomy, and oppressed with fears. "By now poor Buster will have lost a pound or two in weight. He's the greatest fellow ever to fret over things."

At that Jack fairly shouted.

"I know another of the same breed, George, and you can't deny it," he said.

"Oh! well, what's the use?" admitted the other. "I know I do see mountains often, that turn out to be ant hills when you get up close. But I'm feeling particularly jolly right now. Bully for Amos. Won't we shake him by the hand till he yells out for mercy. His name will be emblazoned on the annals of our St. Lawrence cruise as the best friend the motor boat club had, barring none."

Of course, they were set upon as soon as they entered the den in the top story of the Stormways home, and made to tell what had happened. When the balance of the club learned how neatly a spoke had been put in the wheel of Clarence, they voted thanks to Mr. Edison for all he had done in the interests of

modern science.

And it can be set down as positive that those lads spent a much more healthy Sunday than would have been the case had their minds still wrestled with the problem of what the mysterious message sent by Clarence stood for.

Then came the final morning when they were scheduled to leave the home town, headed for the far distant Clayton, to begin their summer vacation.

A score and more of boys were at the station to see them depart, besides those persons who constituted the various families of the club members. Their baggage was properly seen to, and then the last goodbyes said. Clarence and his crony, Joe Brinker, came sauntering along, and stood watching the passing of the expedition.

"He can't just help grinning all the time," Buster said aside to Herb, as they were waiting at the car steps for Jack and George, still talking with a group of friends.

"Sure he is," replied George, looking out of the corner of his eye, "and every little while he says something to Bully Joe that tickles him to beat the band. But we can afford to keep quiet, because we happen to know how the game is going. I'm putting my faith in Amos right along; he's going to make good."

"But why ain't Clarence and Joe starting, too?" demanded Nick at this juncture.

"Oh! they're too sly for that, you see," George replied, knowingly, his lawyer blood standing him in good stead. "Like as not they've got through tickets right through Chicago, while we stop over in Milwaukee. And even if they slip away this afternoon they could get to Clayton as soon as we do."

"There's the conductor calling 'all aboard!' We're off, fellows!" cried Buster, as he started to climb up the steps of the car, an operation that required more labor on his part than in the case of more agile lads.

The entire bunch grouped on the last platform of the parlor car at the end of the train, and as they pulled out, waved their hats in salute to the cheering of the crowd at the station.

Faster went the train, and presently a turn hid the home town from the sight of the six vacationists. If any of them felt badly over parting from loved ones they succeeded in concealing the fact as they passed inside to take their seats, and while looking from the windows at new scenes, lay delightful plans concerning the glorious time they anticipated would be their portion when they got fully started on their St. Lawrence river cruise.

CHAPTER V—THE GUARDIAN OF THE FLEET

"Well, here's the steamboat dock, all right; but I don't see anything of our boats!" exclaimed George, as he and his five chums came to a full stop close to the local office of the lake line running to Buffalo, Milwaukee and Chicago.

"Oh! dear me, I hope we don't have trouble, after all," started Nick.

"Here, let up on that misery whine, Buster. Will you ever learn never to squeal till you're hurt?" said Josh.

"Well, if you'd lost as much flesh as I have lately, you'd be a nervous wreck too," replied the fat boy, aggressively.

"If I'd lost all you say you have, there wouldn't be anything more of me left than a grease spot, and that's right!" grinned Josh.

"What shall we do, Jack?" and Herb turned to the one upon whom they usually depended to steer them clear of the shoals.

"Well, here's the office right handy," replied Jack, smiling. "Suppose we crowd inside, and make the agent give up some information. He ought to know what's happened to our boats, because we understood they got here safe."

"A bully idea, Jack; you're the goods when it comes to doing the right thing!" Josh remarked.

Accordingly they fell in line, and rushed into the little office, where a gentlemanly fellow, who was working at some freight accounts, in his shirt sleeves, because of the heat of the day, glanced up in more or less surprise.

"We're looking for some motor boats, sir, that arrived on the vessel from the west. They were billed from Milwaukee by your line."

As Jack said this the agent smiled.

"Which one of you wired our Mr. Matthews?" he asked.

"I did. My name is Jack Stormways," replied that individual.

"You gave him authority to turn the three boats over to some party, didn't you?"

"Yes, if that party's name was Mr. Amos Spofford," Jack replied.

"All right. We gave them into his keeping. Let me see, that was last Saturday afternoon about one o'clock he was here," the other went on.

"But," Jack remarked, blankly, "we've been looking all around, and have seen no sign of our boats on the wharf."

"And they couldn't have flown away like aeroplanes," put in Josh.

"I should hardly think so," laughed the other. "But have you looked beyond the end of the dock, in the water?"

"No. Do you mean to say Mr. Spofford had the three boats launched?" cried Jack.

"Well, there was something doing that way, I remember, on Saturday. He had quite a gang of men working under him. That Mr. Spofford seems to be something of a hustler. Over toward that point, boys."

They were already trooping across the big dock, as excited as any eager lads could be. And no sooner had they reached a certain point than a series of whoops burst from every throat.

"There they are, fellows! Don't they make a bully show, though, the brave little boats? Say, ain't this like old times again?" cried Nick, as he discovered the three craft anchored close together at a point where they would not be in the way of any steamboat landing.

"There's somebody aboard, too!" exclaimed Jack, as a head was poked out of the deck tent of the *Comfort*, which was the only one of the trio to be thus honored, the others being in cruising trim.

"That must be Mr. Amos Spofford," declared Herb; "and he knows a good sleeping boat when he sees it, too; for you notice he's camped in the Old Reliable."

Jack waved his hand, and then called out.

"We're coming aboard. Are you Mr. Spofford?"

"That's my name. Glad to see you, boys. Come right along. You won't be fired into the harbor if you try to get aboard!" came back the answering hail.

"Gee! I wonder if that's what happened to Jared," remarked Nick, as the party made for the landing, where a rowboat could be obtained in which to paddle out to the anchored flotilla.

Every boy had his eyes glued on the boat that, to his mind, represented all that was delightful. Many a happy day and night had they spent aboard these same craft in times that were gone; and the future opened up possibilities just as joyous.

One by one they climbed aboard the *Comfort* and shook hands with the jolly old gentleman whom they found there. None of the other boats could have accommodated them as readily as the big launch.

"Glad you got here safe and sound, boys. I imagine this is Jack Stormways. Introduce me to your chums, please, Jack. Told you not to worry. Camped right here ever since getting your message. Would have stayed a week if necessary, because you see I happen to be an old bachelor, without any family ties. Greatest pleasure I've had for many a year. Used to knock about myself, once upon a time, before I took on flesh. And let me tell you, lads, you've got the greatest little cruising outfits here I ever set eyes on. In my day we never knew such comforts, any more than we did such bully boats."

In this fashion did Mr. Amos Spofford rattle on, for he was a great talker, and a retired lawyer as well. He quite staggered poor Buster by the immensity of his girth; for he was simply *tremendous*, and no mistake.

"Gracious!" Nick whispered to Herb, when he found the chance; "you don't think, now, I'll ever get to be like that, do you, Herb? Oh, if I thought so I'd starve myself."

"Well, it would end your knocking about, just as it did his, so beware!" answered the other; and chuckled to see poor Buster shiver.

All the time they were in contact with Mr. Amos Spofford Nick could not keep his eyes off the wheezy old lawyer; and every now and then he would shake his head and sigh most dismally. It was really an awful lesson for Buster, as Josh often declared.

"Then you've really enjoyed camping here since Saturday afternoon, sir?" asked Jack, as the party clustered around the guardian of the motor boat fleet.

"Beyond measure," came the quick reply. "I haven't let the boats go unwatched a minute of the time. On Monday I hired a man to stay aboard while I finished up some little business that was pressing. Then I came back in the afternoon with a new supply of grub, and determined to hold the fort. Why, boys, it's been the happiest days of the last ten years to me. And I've made up my mind that I'm going to throw business to the dogs, have a boat like this, only larger, built especially for a heavy man, and take to the water. I thank you for the opportunity you threw in my way for this pleasure."

"And on our part we feel that you've been mighty kind to us, sir," said Jack.

"Don't mention it. Besides, I'm only too glad to do something for Rube's boy. He was good to me once upon a time, and helped me get back on my feet."

"Perhaps our anxiety was all for nothing though?" remarked George; not because he really believed what he was saying, but hoped it would tempt Mr.

Spofford to "open up," and tell anything he knew.

The stout lawyer chuckled until he shook like a bowl full of jelly. He reminded Jack of Santa Claus around Christmas time, both with regard to his white beard and the size of his paunch.

"Ah! that was a chip of the old block that spoke then," laughed Mr. Spofford, "Rube for all the world; and a born lawyer, too. Follow in the footsteps of your illustrious dad, George, and the world is yours. No, to tell the plain, unvarnished truth, your anxiety *was* well placed, I have reason to believe."

He looked over the side at the water, and chuckled again.

"It is pretty wet in there for a fact, boys," he said, "and when a fellow flops over with all his clothes on, he feels kind of squeamish, I suppose."

"Do you mean to say, sir, that Jared Fullerton actually attempted to come aboard in the night, and that you dumped him into the river?" asked Herb.

"Oh! I didn't bother asking his name; and so far as I know he never had the politeness to leave one of his visiting cards behind him," remarked the big lawyer, still shaking, so that the staunch old *Comfort* actually quivered in sympathy. "In fact, to tell the truth, he was so set upon leaving in a hurry after he discovered that there was a tenant ahead of him, that lots of things were sadly neglected."

"And you threw him overboard, sir?" asked Jack.

"That was the easiest part of it," replied the other, calmly. "You see I used to be a great athlete in my day, when Rube knew me; and the fellow wasn't anticipating running up against a lodger. I just gave him a neat push, and you ought to have heard the splashing that followed."

"Wow! I'd have liked to, first rate!" declared Josh, in ecstacy.

"But he managed to climb out again, of course, Mr. Spofford?" Jack asked.

"Oh! yes, after a lot of floundering around. I saw him climbing that spile yonder, dripping at every move. And I've had no trouble since."

"Then we owe you a vote of thanks for helping us out in this way," declared George, warmly. "Only for your guardianship something serious would have happened to our boats; and you can understand, sir, that they are precious to all of us, after serving us so well on that Mississippi cruise."

"I want to hear all about that at the first chance, boys. But now I'll move out, and give the rightful owners possession. This is a very well named boat, Herbert. I give you credit for knowing how to get full enjoyment out of a trip. Now, that speed boat doubtless pleases George, but you see it would hardly do for a fellow of my heft. I'm going to get the builder of this outfit to put me one up that will be a dream, a fat man's paradise."

"Hold on, Mr. Spofford," said Jack, who knew he was voicing the sentiments

of the entire club when he spoke as he did; "we are going to stay around here until another morning, for we've got a lot to do, stowing our stores, you know. And tonight, if you can do so, we invite you to a little dinner, to be held on this boat. We hope you will please us by coming; and let me tell you we've got the boss cook among us, who can tickle your palate the best ever."

All eyes were turned toward Josh, who got up and gravely bowed, pushing back Buster, who had impudently been in the act of accepting the honor himself.

"I'll do it on one condition, boys," said the lawyer, as he started to deposit his bulk in the boat Herb was holding to the side of the *Comfort*.

"What is that, sir?" demanded Jack.

"That you promise to read to me the log of your last trip, when you went down the big river; also tell me the many adventures that I'm sure must have come your way during those glorious weeks."

"Done!" cried one and all, as they shook hands with the jolly retired lawyer, and Herb started to paddle him to the dock.

"What time is dinner hour, fellows?" sang out Mr. Spofford, just as heartily as though he might be one of the youngsters.

"Six sharp; but we'll wait for you any length of time you say, sir," replied Jack.

"Look for me before that time; and remember, boys, I'm a man of some size, so be warned," laughed the other, waving his hand.

"Oh! we know all about that, sir; because, you see, we've got a shining example of the same with us," called Josh, motioning toward Buster.

"That's so; but I'm afraid you mean a *horrible* example; for we fat fellows are to be pitied," floated back to their ears.

Nick sank back on his seat, looking plainly troubled.

"Oh! my, if I thought there was any danger of my ever getting like that I'd—I'd, well, I don't know what I'd do; but something pretty desperate—skip a meal once a week, perhaps," he remarked to George.

The other was already trying to draw his own boat alongside, so that he might aboard; for naturally each skipper had thought of the craft that was dearest to his mind; and Herb returning, both Jack and Jimmie used the rowboat to reach the anchored *Tramp*.

CHAPTER VI—THE "FLASH"

For an hour or more the boys were busily engaged in rummaging.

Then they began to think about getting their luggage aboard, as well as the necessary supplies. Jack had his lists made out to the fraction. Previous experience would prove of considerable benefit to them now, since they knew just what was most needed, and what things to leave behind.

"I say, Jack!" called George, across the scant space that separated their boats.

"Hello! what is it?" asked the skipper of the *Tramp*, looking up.

"We've all been so busy we haven't thought to look around," remarked George; "and consequently missed seeing that dandy craft lying off there a couple of hundred yards. Nobody seems to be aboard, as far as I've noticed. My! but ain't she a beaut, though? Such graceful lines. I warrant she can just skim the water, and make you *dizzy* watching her. Do you know what struck me, Jack?"

"That this might be the swift boat Clarence has had built, and which he said was going to cut capers all around our fleet," replied the other, promptly.

"Guessed it the first shot. Am I right?" asked George.

"Looks to me like a regular black, piratical craft," observed Josh. "Just notice how low she sits in the water, would you? And there's something sneaky in her whole make-up. Yes, that sort of a boat just seems to fit in with a fellow like Clarence Macklin, 'Sneaky Clarence,' you remember."

"There's a name in gold letters on her bow, but I can't quite make it out. Here, Buster, just hand me my glasses, will you?"

A minute later George, having adjusted the marine glasses to his sight, gave utterance to a low whistle.

"I've got the name all right, fellows," he remarked, "and what d'ye think it is? Just the plain word *'Flash.'* I guess that stands for speed all right."

"It also stands for what Clarence and Bully Joe represent," Herb observed.

Often, as they busied themselves during the balance of that day, George's

eyes would wander toward that long, narrow boat that sat upon the heaving water with the grace of a black swan from Australia. George believed he could see the times when it would be nip and tuck between the *Flash* and his own hitherto unbeaten *Wireless*; and he confessed that perhaps the boast of the rival of the motor boat boys might not have been without reasonable foundation.

Knowing how many times they must go ashore before the stores and supplies were all aboard, the motor boat boys realized that it would be a saving of time if they raised anchor, and moored alongside the dock.

This was accordingly done. As noon had come, they went in detachments to the nearest hotel, and secured a meal; after which their baggage was taken aboard. Then, leaving the others to stow it away, as on the previous cruise, Jack, Herb and George went into town to purchase what their long list called for.

Nick called out after them three times, begging them on each occasion to be sure and not forget a certain thing of which he happened to be particularly fond. Josh poked a whole lot of fun at the fat boy, and warned him to beware lest he equal the enormous girth of Mr. Amos in a short time if he did not curb that tremendous appetite.

"Oh! don't you fret about that," Nick answered. "In good time I expect to gradually cut down my rations until I become as skinny as you. Then, like enough, I'll want to jump overboard and end it all."

That was always Nick's way—*tomorrow* he meant to start in regulating his diet; but as usual with those who put off the evil day, tomorrow never seemed to come.

That was a busy afternoon with them all.

Jack saw to it that the eatables were put up in three separate packages all around, so that they could be handed over to the several boats without division. This helped wonderfully, for there was no choosing, and no ill feeling because one happened to get a better looking assortment than the others.

"It's near stopping time, fellows!" called Nick, as he squatted on a seat, like a big toad, Josh said, and wiped the perspiration from his rosy face.

"Well, I guess everything's ready," added Jack.

"Ditto here," came from Herb. "And Josh is already rustling the kettles, as if he meant business. So I move we pull out again and anchor. When the gent comes we can get him aboard with the help of this rowboat he hired for us."

That sort of talk seemed to satisfy every one; and accordingly they set about working the motor boats to the positions they had occupied previously, at the time their mudhooks were down.

Then began great preparations for a feast. Both the other boats handed over

their several batteries for cooking. Their previous experience had taught George and Herb a lesson, so that they had discarded their cumbersome oil lamps, and now each rejoiced in a fine new, brass Jewel gas oil-stove, of the same reliable German brand as that which Jack carried when on the famous Mississippi trip, now but a fond memory.

And they were surely a busy lot, every one working under the directions of the head *chef*. Josh might play second, and even third fiddle, many times; but when it came to cooking he was right there, as he himself said, "with the goods." Some boys may seem gifted in one way, and a comrade shine in another; it was the privilege of Josh Purdue to be a natural born cook. He could throw together the most appetizing dishes with apparently little effort. Everything he touched had a decidedly delightful taste. And even Buster admitted that he stood without a peer, monarch of all he surveyed.

So it came about that when Mr. Spofford arrived on the dock, and was ferried across by Herb, he found some mighty fine odors wafting hither and thither.

"My goodness!" he said, as he sniffed vigorously, "I hope dinner won't be long delayed, boys, because you've just got me keyed up to a desperate pitch, with all these joyful smells afloat."

"Ready right now, sir!" sang out Josh, who had donned a snow-white baker's muslin cap, which he had fetched along with the intention of coaxing Buster to wear, when engaged in his culinary tasks.

They were a jolly crowd gathered in the roomy *Comfort*, and discussing the glorious dinner prepared under the direction of the head *chef*.

"Josh, you haven't forgotten how," observed Jack, as he started in on the savory mess piled up on his pannikin.

"Which pleases me a whole lot," said George; "because you see, Mr. Spofford, on this trip Josh sails with me in my *Wireless*."

"Alas! poor Josh! I see his finish. These are funeral meats, fellows," giggled Buster, already warmly engaged.

And so they laughed and joked as the meal progressed. Mr. Amos was as merry as any one of the six boys. Again he seemed carried back to the days when he loved this sort of life; and many times did they hear him declare positively:

"You've opened up the fount that has been closed for many years, boys. And after this it's me for the free life and the fresh air. Perhaps that may reduce my overabundant flesh somewhat. Anyway, it will delight my heart. Away with dull care; and from this time on I'm going to study Nature again! And I have you to thank for opening my eyes. It was a lucky day my old friend Rube thought of me, and put his boy in touch with Amos Spofford."

"Perhaps you'd like to go out a few days, sir, with us," remarked Herb, quite overwhelmed by the cordial ways of the retired lawyer. "This boat is roomy, you see, and we might get along. The only difficulty would be about sleeping quarters."

Poor Nick held his breath in suspense. If so be Mr. Spofford accepted, he believed he saw his finish. But the other only laughed heartily.

"That's awfully kind of you, Herb, but I couldn't think of accepting," he said; and Nick breathed easy again. "When I go out, I shall have a boat that is suited to my heft. Every time I move here, something seems to groan, and threaten to give way. I guess you will have all you can manage with my friend, Buster."

And after the hearty meal was finished they made themselves as comfortable as possible, while Jack read the official log of the other cruise, for the particular benefit of Mr. Amos.

The latter asked a thousand questions, and in this way managed to get a comprehensive history of all the stirring adventures that had fallen to their lot between their home town on the great river and the Crescent City.

It was quite late when he left them, giving to each a squeeze of the hand that would not soon be forgotten.

"If I can only find a boat suited to my size, boys," he said, as he left them; "I'm going to get afloat this very season. But at any rate another year will find me fully prepared for the season, with the greatest motor boat you ever struck. Goodbye, you fine and dandy fellows! My heart will be with you all along. Think of me sometimes, won't you, Buster?"

He chuckled as he fancied he heard a hollow groan from Nick; as if the memory of Mr. Spofford's tremendous girth could ever long leave the troubled mind of the fat boy.

A quiet night followed. Jack advised that they keep on the alert, lest some peril drop in upon them; but fortunately his fears were not realized, and morning coming found the little fleet all serene.

"Look, there he is!" said Nick, as they were gathered on the *Comfort* enjoying one of Josh's little spreads, that included some of the lightest flapjacks ever put before hungry campers.

"Clarence, as sure as anything!" ejaculated Herb.

"And wasn't I right about that boat?" asked Jack. "You can see he's meaning to go out to it right now. But one good thing, we'll be likely to have twenty-four hours' start of them. And on these broad waters they may have some trouble looking us up."

"There's Bully Joe, too," remarked George. "See him look over this way and scowl! Somehow the sight of our gallant little fleet doesn't seem to please Mr.

Brinker a whole lot. He'd be better satisfied if he could only set eyes on them awash, with their decks level with the water."

Clarence did not seem to glance once toward the three motor boats. A third party joined them, and it was not hard for Jack and his friends to guess that this must be the unlucky Jared Fullerton, whom the stalwart Mr. Spofford had dumped into the waters of the St. Lawrence when he attempted to board the *Comfort* one night not so very long since.

Just as soon as they were well through with breakfast, the motor boat boys got ready to put out on the broad waters which were, from now on, to serve them as a field of recreation.

Jack gave the signal, when he had learned that both the others were ready. Immediately there was a tremendous amount of energetic popping, as the motors once more got into service after their spell of idleness.

Clarence and the others aboard the long dark boat looked after the three departing craft; and while none of our friends bothered waving a hand in parting, Jack could see that the owner of the *Flash* and his crony, Bully Joe, were talking earnestly, as though laying some sort of plan for the near future.

He even saw Clarence pointing after them, and then sweep his hand half way around, as if declaring that no matter where the departing boats might vanish, he would have little trouble in locating them if he wanted to do so.

And to himself Jack was saying that there could be no doubt but that Clarence, with that vindictive, cruel disposition of his, would put himself to almost any trouble in order to get the laugh on those he hated so bitterly.

The sun shone brightly as they pulled out of Clayton, and all of them believed it was a good sign. The last they saw of the suspicious dark boat with the contour of a river greyhound, Clarence was still talking to his mates, and doing a great deal of pointing.

But before them was spread as lovely a stretch of water, with its green and rocky islands, as ever a motor boat cruiser could wish to see. And none of the boys believed on that glorious July morning that they could wish for anything finer than fortune seemed to be placing at their feet.

CHAPTER VII—JOSH SCENTS TROUBLE

"What luck, Jack?"

It was just a week later. The three motor boats were anchored in a little cove near one of the numerous rocky islands that give this part of the wide St. Lawrence river its great reputation for summer outings.

Herb was leaning over the side of his boat, engaged in rubbing some dingy part of the brass railing; and Jack at the time happened to be approaching, seated in a little dinky or tender, which each larger boat now trailed behind every time they made a move from one anchorage to another; and which proved so useful in going ashore, fishing or visiting.

"Oh! pretty fair," replied the one who handled the short oars, as he turned in his seat to reach for something that lay in the bow of the skiff. "We can have a fish dinner tonight, anyway."

Then he held up a monster muskalonge, that must have weighed all of twenty pounds.

"Great Jupiter, what a sock-dollager!" cried George, who was taking it easy in his boat; while Nick thrust up his head to shout:

"Bully for you, Jack! Now we won't starve to death! The country is saved!"

"Well, I like that," said Herb. "To hear him talk you'd think I'd cut him down to one meal a day, when to tell the truth he——"

"Stop right there, Mister Skipper!" cried the fat boy, threateningly. "It's rank treachery to betray your boatmate to the common enemy. But that is a dandy fish, Jack. Where did you catch him?"

"I think in the upper jaw," replied Jack, solemnly, at which there was a shout.

"I see you did," replied Nick, bending over, "for there's a broken hook sticking out of his mouth right now. Ugh! look at the cruel teeth, would you? I'd hate

to let him close his jaws on my finger. But if the gimp snell gave way, how under the sun did you ever get him aboard, Jack?"

"I'll tell you," came the calm reply. "It happened that I had to play this old pirate for nearly twenty minutes before I could tire him out. You'd have laughed to see how he towed my little punkin-seed of a boat around. But finally he seemed all but exhausted, and I kept reeling in until I had him right up close, where I could bend over and touch him with my hand."

"Wow! you couldn't hire me to do that now," exclaimed Nick, shuddering as he gazed at that array of sharp, vicious looking teeth.

"I could see right then and there," Jack continued, quietly, "that the gimp had been twisted until it was ready to break away. So I knew I didn't dare try to lift him aboard by the line; and I had no gaff hook along. So I just let my hand slide over his back until I reached his opening and closing gills. Then I suddenly inserted several of my fingers, and gave a quick fling. He came aboard all right; but the line parted. So you see, Nick, it was a close shave for our supper, all right."

Josh, having made sure the fierce-looking fish was actually dead, by pounding it on the head several times with a piece of wood, started to get it ready for the pan. It was really the first one of decent size that they had thus far hooked; though several meals had been made of small-mouth black bass, taken either by casting, or trolling with a spoon.

"It strikes me as rather queer," remarked Jack, as he lay there resting, "while Jimmie was starting to get supper for the two aboard the *Tramp*, that so far we've neither seen nor heard a thing of Clarence and Joe."

"And haven't we had a great old week of it though?" George remarked. "Outside of one stormy day the weather has been just prime; and even my engine has given no trouble. I'm beginning to have hopes that it's entirely cured of those tantrums that used to bother me so. Or perhaps the Jonah has shifted to your boat, Herb."

"That ain't fair," called out Nick, from some unseen place, where he was wrestling with the cookery department, and slyly taking peeps in his notebook as to whether salt pork was used in frying fish, or butter. "Tell the gentleman, Herb, that I never brought you the least bit of bad luck. Why, we've been getting along here in a perfectly harmonious way, haven't we?"

"Y—yes, I guess so," replied Herb, a little dubiously, "but I'd be a heap happier if only you could forget that business about who leaked, and let out our secret to the enemy. You ding-dong about that thing morning, noon and night. And then you turn around to Mr. Amos, and fret your head off because you're afraid some day you're going to be as much of a whopper as he is."

"Well," grunted Nick, without even taking the trouble to poke his head out, "you know right well this is a world full of trouble, fellows. If it wasn't for my worrying the way I do, just imagine how I'd be taking on flesh. I say, Josh, do you put the salt pork on first, and try it out, before dusting the fish in cracker crumbs and dropping it in the frying pan?"

It was not long before the appetizing odors that arose around the anchorage of the motor boat fleet announced that supper was well under way.

One thing pleased Nick; being the cook aboard the *Comfort* he was in a position to prepare a sufficient quantity to suit his generous ideas of what constituted a meal for a healthy person's appetite; and consequently there was no complaint about short rations. But when, as was inevitably the case, the *Comfort* had to borrow from the other boats, the powerful effect of the fat boy's appetite became very apparent.

"Say, Jack, did you have any particular reason in picking out this place for our next stop?" asked George presently.

"Why, yes, lots of them," laughed the one addressed. "In the first place it was an extra big island, and situated near the Canadian shore, you see. Then again, the place looked kind of fishy, don't you know; and I had an idea we might pick up some large muskies. From the fact that I did bring in a dandy, first start, it seems as if my guess hit the mark."

"It sure did," George went on. "But you don't know anything out of the way about this heavily wooded island here, do you?"

"To be sure I don't, since I couldn't tell you right now what name it is known under," answered Jack, who knew the other had some object back of his questions, for George always led up to things, and never took delight in springing a surprise on his chums, as most of the others would invariably do.

"I just wondered if you could know any reason for it, that's all," George said.

"Reason for what? Now you've got me guessing; and that's probably just what you wanted to do," observed Jack. "Speak up, and tell me what you've noticed."

"Well, we seem to be objects of considerable curiosity to some people."

"Ashore, do you mean?" and Jack turned his head, to glance at the frowning bank of the big island, the grim rocks of which were crowned with a dense growth of trees and underbrush, so that it certainly looked rather mysterious as the sun began to set.

"Well, no, I don't believe any of us have seen a living thing there, except a coon, fishing on the edge; and a kingfisher flying from stump to stump along the rim of the water. But three separate times a boat has come along just out there,

and the people in her would just stare at us without saying a single word."

"Three, you say—the same boat and the same people?" Jack asked.

"Not at all," George replied. "That would not have seemed so queer, you know; for I could believe that they happened to have an interest in this cove, and disliked seeing us stop here; or else that the Canadian authorities thought Yankees had no right to be fishing over on their side of the broad river. It was the same boat."

"Three different boats, eh?" Jack mused. "And they looked unhappy at seeing our fleet quartered here?"

"I thought they looked mad," Josh put in right then, popping his head up like a jack-in-the-box; for he still persisted in wearing that white cap while engaged in his department of the pots and pans.

"Were there any women or children aboard the boats?" Jack continued.

"How about that, fellows?" asked George.

"One boat had two men, another three, and the last one five," Herb remarked, in his positive way.

"And they all stood off some distance, just looking at us. Perhaps there are thieves in these waters, just as we found down on the Mississippi," Josh added.

"Maybe we'd better change our anchorage after supper, and hunt a new place. There's going to be a bully moon tonight, fellows," from Nick, still unseen.

"Oh! I don't think there's any call for us to run away—yet," Jack laughed. "No doubt the men were from the Canada side, and there was some reason why they looked at our little fleet so queerly."

"Well," Josh said, as if he had been worried more or less about the matter, "I only hope one thing; that this blessed old island ain't haunted, that's all!"

Jack laughed at that, it put such a new aspect on affairs. At the same time he could not help thinking that superstitious Josh certainly had some ground for allowing such an idea to seize hold of his mind; for the island, with its dense vegetation, and its rough shore line, did look out of the common. No doubt, when night dropped her blanket over the broad river with its myriad of islands, both large and small, this spooky place could easily be believed to shelter uncanny things.

"Don't give yourself any more uneasiness on that score, Josh," Jack urged. "If there ever was a ghost anywhere near this place it took wings long ago, when the thousands of summer tourists began coming here for their vacations. What with the big hotels, and the hundreds of cottages perched on the islands, small chance a poor spirit would have today."

While he said nothing more about the three boats with their unfriendly

crews, Jack did not entirely forget them. Perhaps there might have been some deep reason for the strange actions of these men. Perhaps—but then, without any foundation for a theory, what was the use bothering himself forming any such?

The night came on; but even while they were eating supper a change had begun to take place in the weather conditions. Nick's prediction of a beautiful moonlight night gave promise of being far from the actual fact; for clouds had drifted over the heavens, some of them dark and threatening, though as yet broken.

"We may get a storm before morning," observed George, looking up.

"And I wager Jack foresaw that same thing when he picked out this cove for our anchorage," declared Herb. "You notice that it is to the eastward of the island; and don't you see about all the storms up here come out of the west. In that way we will be protected against a heavy blow."

Jack might have kept still, and allowed his chums to heap honors on his unworthy head; but that was not his style.

"Hold on, you're doing me too much credit, boys," he observed frankly. "I took to this cove just because it looked good to me, and never for a minute thinking how it would serve us in case of a blow. But just as Herb says, we are protected here, and that's another reason for not changing, as Nick hinted we should do."

They ate supper before the dusk turned into night, and the whippoorwills were calling from back on the wooded island, to be answered from the further Canada shore.

The three boats were close enough together to allow the boys a chance to exchange any remarks they wished.

"Better get ready in case we have a downpour tonight," remarked Jack, as he cast a look upward to where the moon was just starting to peep out from behind a threatening bank of clouds.

"For one I'm glad I got that hole in my tent mended in time," observed Herb.

"Me too," spoke up Buster, "because, you see, it was so nicely fixed right over my poor head. Think of a stream turned on while you slept! Ugh! when I take my cold baths I'll choose my time."

"I've known when you didn't all the same," ventured George, chuckling.

"That's mean of you," Buster replied, reproachfully, "bringing up old happenings. Yes, I did fall overboard into the river; but who wouldn't, in that cranky speedy boat of yours, shivering and jumping to beat the band. Why, hello! what ails Josh there?"

"Yes, what are you staring so hard at, Josh?" demanded George, turning his head.

"Didn't any of the rest of you see it?" asked the other, eagerly.

"See what? Are you beginning on that ghost racket already?" insinuated Herb.

"Ghost nothing," exclaimed Josh; "and yet truth to tell it did glide out of sight behind the point yonder like a phantom boat. Then the moon went under, and I lost it again!"

CHAPTER VIII—IN THE MIDNIGHT WATCH

Everybody sat up and took notice when Josh delivered himself after this strange fashion. If it had been a mere glimpse of some white object which he claimed to have seen ashore they might have smiled, and let it go at that. But a boat was a different proposition. They were interested in boats; and indeed, expecting sooner or later to be visited by a certain dark craft, fashioned along a piratical type.

"Where did you see it, Josh?" asked George, hastily jumping to his feet; and almost taking a header into the water; for his delicately balanced speed craft did not allow such energetic movements with impunity.

"Well, give a feller a chance, won't you?" grumbled the other, as he clutched the brass railing just in time to save himself. "I'm not in such a hurry to go after the phantom boat as to want to *swim!* Besides," he added, as an afterthought, "I haven't forgotten that savage musky Jack brought in today. If they hang out around this region you don't catch Josh Purdue doing any bathing, not much."

"But tell us, where did you see this queer boat that moves along as silent as a specter?" asked Nick.

"Didn't you get on to what I said?" continued the other, impatiently. "Around that point yonder it seemed to glide. I lost it in the shadows."

"Listen to him hedge, fellows!" cried Nick. "Now he says it 'seemed to glide.' That is as much as saying he ain't sure whether he was awake or dreaming."

"I tell you the boat was there," Josh persisted; "and if the mean old moon hadn't just bobbed behind that cloud up yonder, all of you might have had a chance to glimpse her."

"But you had one look at her, didn't you?" asked Jack.

"Sure I did. And because I didn't hear any noise of a motor I just had to stare," came the ready reply.

"Was it a white pleasure boat?" continued Jack.

"Not much. I could have seen that sort right along, moon or no moon. I know what you're thinking, Jack."

"All right. Was it a dark-colored launch, then?" the other demanded.

"This time it's yes—a long, low, narrow craft, that seemed to just spin along like a shadow itself. But I know it was a boat, because I could see the water curling over, where the bow cut through," Josh went on.

"You hear that, fellows?" Jack remarked. "And of course, you understand what it means to us?"

"That boat was the *Flash*, and Clarence has found us out at last?" said George; not without a trace of eagerness in his voice; for so well had his speed launch been behaving of late that he was anxious to test her against the newer craft of Clarence Macklin.

"Just like him to come sneaking around at night to see how he can do us some rotten injury," grunted Nick.

"Lit him thry it, that's all," remarked Jimmie, popping his head up. "I'm thinkin' the gossoon will be sorry for it, wan way or t'other."

"But that means we shall have to keep watch, doesn't it, Jack?"

Of course it was Herb who said this, for he might be set down as the most timid of the six boys; though there had been times in the past when even Herb had risen to the occasion, to prove that he could show valor.

"No doubt about that," returned the other, seriously. "You know the benefit we found in being prepared when on that trip to Dixie land. It pays to be ready for trouble. Meeting it half way often ends in victory. Oh! yes, the squad will have to turn out, and take turns tonight."

All this had been carefully arranged beforehand. Jack knew his crowd, and also what little failings they might be apt to develop. For instance, he understood that it was hardly the part of wisdom to allow Nick to stand his spell of sentry duty alone. However willing the fat boy might declare himself he was apt to be overcome by drowsiness and fall asleep at his post.

"Think we'd better move out a bit from the shore?" asked Josh, after they had talked matters over for a further spell, and looked in vain for the mysterious dark motor boat to appear again around the point of the wooded island.

"What for?" asked George.

"Sure, the howlding's foine roight here," asserted Jimmie, who had personally seen to it that the *Tramp's* anchor was well placed; though it could be readily tripped in case of a sudden need for a move during a storm.

"But to tell the honest truth, fellows, I don't just like the looks of this old

island here," admitted the cook of the *Wireless*, boldly.

"I don't see anything the matter with it?" remarked George. "In fact, simply because it seems deserted is no reason we ought to cut loose, and change moorings. If it belonged to some millionaire, and had a cottage perched on the rocks, the chances are ten to one we'd have been asked to move long before now."

"I agree with George," Jack remarked. "And that was the main reason why I determined to come here, where it looked so attractive. When fellows are off on a little trip like this, the very places they should avoid are those where too much civilization is found. Give me the wild spots every time."

"Oh! well, I withdraw my motion then," grumbled Josh. "But don't blame me if anything happens, that's all."

"Would ye be afther listenin' till him?" exclaimed Jimmie, hilariously. "Sure he do be thinkin' still about that banshee. And Jack, since ye are to sthand watch wid Josh, be warrned in toime, to look out for throuble. If wishin' would bring ghosts it's me honest belafe Josh would raise a whole raft of thim."

But in talking of many other things the boys soon seemed to forget about these fears on the part of the one who confessed to a belief in hobgoblins.

When several of the inmates of the gathered boats started to yawn at a tremendous rate, word was given that they turn in.

"It's eleven o'clock, boys, just think of it?" said Herb, as he lighted a lantern in order to make up his bed more comfortably; for Herb believed in getting all the benefit possible out of things, even when on a cruise.

"And we can count on broad daylight by four o'clock, though we needn't get up till five," Jack observed. "So I've divided the six hours into three watches. Josh and myself will stay on duty until one. Then Herb and Jimmie will take our places, and at three they are to wake up George and Buster. Understand that, fellows?"

"Yes," came the response, in some cases very sleepily.

"How about you, Josh; think you can stay awake two hours now?" Jack asked.

"I drank more coffee for supper than usual," the other answered, "and the way I feel now, I don't seem to care one bit whether I get a wink of sleep tonight or not."

As things were reduced to a pretty good system by this time, with regard to the making up of beds, it did not require much time to get these in readiness. Herb was the only fussy one; and they were threatening to call him an old maid, and get a cap and gown for him, if he kept on that way. But Herb paid no attention to all this talk. When he had his mind made up it required an earthquake to change it.

Finally his lantern went out, although Josh kept it within reach of his hand, in case he needed light in a hurry while doing his trick as sentinel.

He and Jack could converse in low tones without disturbing the sleepers, should they care to do so. Jack meant to exchange a few words occasionally, if only to convince himself that the other had not been overtaken by drowsiness.

No longer did the moon peep out from the dark curtains above. The cloud banks had effectually covered the face of the heavens as with a pall. Still it did not rain, and thus far there were no other indications of a brooding storm.

It was impossible to see for any distance around. Even out upon the water objects were indistinct at fifty feet; and as for the nearby island it rested there like a black hillock, above which the tips of the inky pines could be seen outlined against the less opaque sky.

Now and then the night breeze moaned dismally through these treetops, making a queer sound. Jack noticed that every time this happened there would be a slight movement in the *Comfort*; and he understood that Josh must be turning his head to stare toward the island. Josh, then, had not entirely given up the idea of seeing a ghost; and this uncanny sound made him remember his prediction.

It was impossible to note the passage of time by the stars, for they were quite out of sight, and no clock striking could give warning; for there was not a church within many miles of their anchorage.

So when Jack began to wonder how much longer he and Josh ought to hold the fort, he had to strike a match and consult the little nickel watch he carried.

"Gosh! how you scared me!" exclaimed the other sentry, as the match crackled.

"Half past twelve," Jack remarked, in a low tone. "That means another half hour for us, Josh. How are you feeling about now?"

"Well," admitted the other, "I guess I was near dozing that time. Thought somebody shot at me when you scratched that match. How loud everything sounds at this time of night. Wish that old bird would let up on that screeching, over on the Canada shore. He makes me tired, for a fact."

"Depends on the way you look at things," chuckled Jack. "Now, for my part I rather like to hear a whippoorwill call. Never yet kept me awake either, like some things would do. Have a bite of this gingerbread, Josh. Keeping watch is hungry work, after all, I find. Besides, while your jaws are working, you won't get sleepy."

Josh was nothing averse to a "snack," and so they sat there, eating, and occasionally exchanging some remark, while the balance of the crowd slept on.

The boats were anchored far enough apart to avoid striking should a wind

arise. But on account of his desire to keep in touch with Josh, Jack had seen to it that the stern of each craft was drawn toward the other. In this fashion then they could have shaken hands by leaning over the intervening foot or so of water.

It so happened that while Jack was devoting most of his attention to the watery expanse that stretched away toward the east, Josh on the other hand found the neighboring island more interesting.

Each acted on his own idea as to the nature of the danger that might come upon them. With Josh it was the peril that stalks during the middle of the night, and frightens men through its connection with spectral forms. Jack, on the other hand, suspected that Clarence and his crony, Bully Joe, might be planning some sort of a mean raid, that would spoil the pleasure of the motor boat club.

"Jack!" whispered the occupant of the *Comfort* in a hoarse voice.

"Well, what do you want?" replied the other lad, serenely.

"I am sure I heard a suspicious noise ashore just then!" Josh continued.

"Oh! rats! You're always hearing things, Josh. Like as not it was only a poor old 'coon, hunting around on the beach for a fish that has been cast up. Get it off your mind. It's only a little time longer, and then you to dreamland."

"There it goes again, Jack! Didn't you catch it that time? I tell you it means something. Hark! now will you believe me?"

Josh was growing more and more excited. He even raised his voice above the low tone in which up to now they had conversed. But small danger of any of those sound sleepers being so easily awakened. It would require a shaking to accomplish that.

Jack certainly did hear the sounds now. These consisted of a strange clacking, the nature of which it was impossible to guess. Then would come a plain, unmistakable groan! No wonder poor Josh shivered, and turned cold with apprehension, considering what his recent belief had been.

"Oh, my! there's sure something moving up there, Jack! Don't you see it—over by that place where we saw the silver birch? Watch it, Jack! There, look! look!" and as he spoke Josh raised his voice still more until it almost became a shout.

Movements told that he had finally succeeded in arousing the sleep squad. Nick was heard to yawn, and grumble, as usual; while Herb poked his head out from the side curtains to ask what all the row meant.

"Didn't I tell you it would come?" shouted Josh suddenly. "Just look there on that blamed island, and see what we get for sticking here! Now laugh at me for believing in ghosts, will you? Herb, can't we cut the anchor rope, and make a quick getaway? Please say yes, because I'm that scared I'm shaking all over!"

And every eye was by this time glued upon the strange spectacle ashore that had given poor Josh his fright.

CHAPTER IX—THE GHOST OF THE ISLAND

"Wow! it's sure a banshee!" whooped Jimmie.

"A-am I dreaming, fellows?" exclaimed Herb, rubbing his eyes desperately.

"O-oh! look at it shake its fist at us, would you! It's ten feet high, if it's one!" came from the quivering lips of Buster.

But Jack as yet had not said a word, though he was staring just as hard at the remarkable sight ashore as any of them. It was something different from anything that had ever before crossed his path. Perhaps Jack might have felt a little chilly sensation as he looked; but he was not at all frightened.

Up on the rise of the mysterious island there had appeared a dim figure that seemed, just as Nick vowed, to be all of ten feet in height. At first it was like a curling column of smoke, when a certain kind of wood has been thrown on the fire. Then it seemed to take form, and change to a flickering yellow glow.

The groaning sounds continued all the while, as though this disturbed spirit from the other world might be in great pain. And certainly the figure was waving one of its arms as though waving them off.

All of this Jack saw, yet no panic gripped him as it seemed to do the rest, who were crouching there, staring, and gasping for breath.

"Jimmie, hand me my shotgun, and let's see if it can stand Number Threes!"

Jack called this out in a loud, clear voice. Not that he wanted the gun to any great extent; but he had an object in saying it.

But Jimmie really believed he meant what he said. While he groped for the gun he was saying aloud:

"Sure, now, 'tis mesilf as doan't belave ye kin knock the daylight out of that banshee wid little shots, Jack, darlint. But if so be ye mane to thry, take the gun, while I shut me eyes."

"'Tain't any use," broke in George; "the thing's disappeared!"

And so it had, vanishing as mysteriously as it had come, and leaving only a black void in front of them. Even that steady groaning had stopped, proving conclusively that it had had to do with the appearance of the spectre.

Jack laughed, to the utter astonishment of the rest.

"I don't see anything funny about this business," complained Nick.

"Well, p'raps you fellers will quit quizzing me after that experience!" said Josh, with just a little ring of triumph in his unsteady voice.

"And will you please stop shaking that way?" remarked George. "For you make the boat rock the worst kind. It was bad enough seeing that blessed thing, without taking a header overboard right now."

"Jack, what makes you laugh?" asked quiet Herb, who knew that the other would not have acted in the way he did unless with good and sufficient cause.

"Do you really want to know?" asked Jack, quietly.

Somehow the fact that one of their number did not seem to be affected by the panic that had swept over the rest began to make George and Jimmie ashamed.

"Sure we do, Jack," remarked the latter, eagerly.

"I was laughing because it was so funny to see how our fine ghost bobbed out of sight the very instant I called to Jimmie to hand me my Marlin," said Jack.

"Oh! I see now!" cried George; "you mean that ghosts needn't be afraid of a handful of bird shot. Is that it, Jack?"

"That's what I meant. I've read lots of ghost stories, just like Josh here; though I never believed them for one minute. But in every case the fellow who tells the yarn declares that bullets have no effect at all on real goblins. Am I right, Josh?"

"It's true, every word of it, Jack!" the other answered, promptly. "Why, I've heard where a soldier whacked the head off a ghost, who coolly picked it up and stuck it on again as neat as you please. Oh! no, they needn't be afraid of little bird shot, not a bit of it."

"Well, this ghost was timid, you see," Jack proceeded. "He fell over just as soon as I called out about my gun."

"Look here, you mean something by that, sure you do!" remarked Herb.

"Fellers, he's hinting that it was a job set up on us—that's what Jack means," declared Nick.

"Out with it, Jack. Don't you see that we're all in a blue funk over this queer deal? If you know anything, share it with your pards," said Herb.

"That's it," observed Josh, who had by now somewhat recovered from his fright; "put us wise old commodore. What d'ye think it was, now?"

"I'll tell you, boys," Jack said, impressively. "In my opinion, honest Injun, now, somebody was trying to frighten us away from here."

"Say, it did wave its long, bony arm, all right!" exclaimed Josh.

"We all saw that," Herb put in; "but what do you suppose anybody would want to make us move our anchorage so much as to go to all that fuss and feathers to scare us?"

"Well," answered Jack, "that's a thing I can just tell—yet! You all admit it did keep waving its arms. And you heard those lovely groans stop just at the same time the thing disappeared. I thought I heard a sound like something falling to the ground. Did anybody else get that?"

"I heard some noise," admitted George. "But, Jack, you certain must have some little suspicion about who engineered this silly game, if it was a set-up job?"

"Well, Josh saw a boat," calmly remarked the one addressed.

"Listen to that, would you?" exclaimed Nick. "He means that it was Clarence who got up that cute game right now—Clarence, our old friend of the baseball diamond. And perhaps the ghost that groaned was only Bully Joe. Fellers, it sound good to me."

"Well, it would be just like Tricky Clarence, as sure as you live!" admitted Herb, who had possibly been the least alarmed of the five.

"But why should he want us to vacate?" demanded Josh, who disliked very much to give up his pet illusion, and believe that the ghost was only the result of a clumsy trick on the part of some person or persons unknown.

"Perhaps he wants this fine little cove himself," suggested George.

"That hardly fills the bill," Jack went on. "He might think to get even for some of the times we've won out in the past. I tell you right now I'm bothered to understand it."

"Do we clear out in the morning, then?" asked Herb.

"I hope you won't say yes to that, fellows. In the first place, it goes against my grain to be chased away by Clarence Macklin or anybody else, who has no right to order us around. And then again, there are some things I'd like to look into connected with this queer affair."

When Jack talked like that he knew the others would fall in with his wishes; for they had long ago come to look upon him as a leader.

"Oh! we'll stick it out if you say so, Jack," declared George. "But you ought to tell us anything else you've got on your mind."

"There was one thing that puzzled me," Jack continued. "It happened while Josh was dozing, or else looking somewhere else, for he didn't seem to notice it. And I didn't say anything, because there was no use waking the rest of you up

then."

"But what was it, Jack?" questioned Kick.

"Why, we settled it in our minds that the old island was uninhabited, didn't we boys?" asked the other.

"That's so," several hastened to declare.

"Well, about half an hour ago, as I chanced to turn my head and look that way, I caught sight of a dim light moving along near the ground. It would disappear, and then come in view again, all the while moving."

"Now, I've seen just such a funny light, when a man with a lantern was walking through the woods," burst out Herb.

"Just what I settled it in my mind that was," chuckled Jack. "But it wasn't so strange that some one should be ashore, and I didn't let it bother me any. After what has happened, though, you can see it must have meant something."

"That's a fact," admitted George. "And, fellows, I'm coming around to Jack's way of thinking. I just bet Tricky Clarence was behind that show."

"Oh! well, let's try to forget it for tonight," Jack observed; "and as it's now just one o'clock, George and Nick will have to take their turn on guard."

"Sure," replied Buster, cheerfully. "Sleep and me have parted company for the rest of this night, after what I saw. So it's me for a four hour stretch; Herb, you can snooze right along till sun-up, if you want."

"Oh! can I? Thanks," laughed the one addressed, with a touch of skepticism in his voice; for he knew only too well what a difference there was between Buster's promises and the keeping of them; he always meant well, but found the flesh weak.

And it proved just as wise Herb supposed would be the case; when the time came for George to go off duty he found Nick fast asleep; so that Herb had to be aroused by repeated calls and punching of the side of the *Comfort*.

Then daylight came; but according to Jack's arrangements no one was aroused until the hour of five, when the sun was well up. July days are long indeed in this northern clime, and the twilight lingers until nearly nine in the evening.

"Who's going to try the fishing today?" asked Jack, as they were partaking of their bacon and egg breakfast, a supply of the hen fruit having been obtained on the previous day from a Canadian farmer, near whose place the little fleet of motor boats had stopped.

"Why, Herb and myself talked of going, if so be you'd post us about the best trolling ground," George remarked.

"Tell you all I know about it," replied Jack, readily enough. "But if you are

lucky enough to strike a big musky like the one I got, you'll have your hands full. Better take the gaff hook along. I wished many times yesterday I had it."

"Will we, George?" asked Herb, in a vein of sarcasm.

"Catch me putting my hand on a pirate like that while he's got an ounce of fight left in him," the other declared. "Why, one snap of those jaws and he'd take your whole paw off, sure. Yes, give us the gaff hook, or we don't go."

"Then you don't intend to keep us company?" asked Herb of Jack.

"I think I'll just hang around here this morning, boys."

"Oh! all right. I can see with half an eye that you've got something up your sleeve, Jack; but post us when the show comes off, won't you?" George remarked, laughingly.

An hour later, long after the two ambitious fishermen had departed in their little rowboats for a siege of trolling along the lonely shores of the island, Jack quietly stepped into his own dinky, and paddled ashore.

"Now what can he be up to?" Nick asked Josh, as they looked after the other.

"Give me something easy, will you?" replied that worthy. "But all the same, I noticed that Jack was careful to take his gun along."

"But he can't shoot any game now; the law is on nearly everything, you know. And up here the wardens are always on the lookout for poachers," Nick continued.

"Oh, shucks!" Josh complained, "you don't see through a millstone, even when it's got a big hole in it. Can't you understand that Jack is bent on looking up that ghost business? Wonder if it was Tricky Clarence at the back of it. Gee! but when I first set eyes on the same I really thought it was a dead sure spirit of some old Injun chief come back from the Happy Hunting Grounds to warn us away."

"Huh! I noticed that you hung on to that same idea to the bitter end," Nick continued pugnaciously. "Right now, I bet you believe deep down in your silly heart, it was a regular hobgoblin. Oh! I know you all right, Josh Purdue; and you've got a scary heart all right. But I saw, just as soon as Jack spoke up, how we'd been fooled by Clarence. Wait till he comes back, and he'll prove it."

"I'd like to know how?" demanded Josh. "Expect him to interview that *thing*, and get a written confession? I'm just wondering what we'll run up against if we're bound to stay here in this cove another night."

"Piffle!" scoffed Nick. "What about guns, hey, tell me that? Ghosts don't appear to like guns much, do they? Jack says not, and Jack, he ought to know. Stay here? Of course we will; a week, two of 'em, if we feel like it!"

"Oh! yes, how brave some people are in the middle of the day, when the sun's shining," jeered Josh. "But wait; that's all! I expect to see you get the scare

of your life tonight, don't you know. If that *thing* gets real mad, and digs in for us you needn't bother worrying about taking on any more fat, because you'll shake that hard you'll lose pounds and pounds! But let's wait till Jack comes back, and find out what he's discovered. I've got a good notion to follow him ashore, if I can pull up the anchor and beach the *Comfort.* Watch how I manage it."

CHAPTER X—FOLLOWING A TRAIL

Josh found his little plan was not hard of accomplishment. All he had to do was to push the *Wireless* around, after letting out all the cable connected with the anchor, when he was able to jump ashore.

He took with him another rope that was fastened to the stern of the motor boat, and this he fastened to the nearest tree. Now, when he wanted to go aboard, all he had to do was to unfasten this latter hawser, climb over the side, and draw the *Wireless* back to her original anchorage.

"Good boy!" cried Nick, who had been a close observer of this clever little game. "You go up head. When it comes to dodges like that, you take the cake."

It was not often that Josh heard a compliment from this source, and he had to stop and wave his hand toward the cook of the *Comfort*, before following after Jack.

He had not gone twenty feet before he discovered the object of his concern, who appeared to be bending over something that seemed to greatly interest him.

"Hello! there, what've you found, Jack? Signs of a diamond mine, or traces of the ice age they tell us about?" Josh demanded, as he reached the side of the other.

"Hello yourself, Josh," replied Jack, looking up with a smile, as though pleased because he was to have some one to talk to, and possibly confer with. "Well, no, I can't just say that either of your guesses comes anywhere near the truth. I'm only examining a trail."

"What's that? Then this old island hasn't always been as deserted as it looks right now, if people sometimes drop ashore here?" remarked Josh, his interest at once aroused.

"Look here and tell me what you see," the other lad continued, as he pointed

to the ground near his feet.

"Say, as sure as you live, it is, for a fact," exclaimed Josh. "Looks like they'd done a heap of passing up and down this way, too. D'ye know, Jack, I wondered what those marks on the little beach meant, and now I understand. Boats, that's what; boats that have been drawn up there when the water was higher than it is now."

"Yes, I saw them," said Jack, quietly. "In fact, I looked to find such marks on the sand. And this broad trail began there, too."

"Oh! I'm beginning to tumble to a few things. I guess that in the season, this same tight little island may be a place for duck shooters to hold out. Perhaps we might even find an old deserted shanty somewhere back yonder in which they camp out during the blustery fall months."

"Hold on, Josh," remarked Jack. "Is that all you know about signs?"

"Why, whatever do you mean?" asked the other, puzzled.

"Take another squint at these marks, and then tell me what you think, Josh."

"Say, I tumble to what you mean!" exclaimed Josh, after he had bent down once more. "You expect me to say that if these marks had been made months ago, with a winter's ice and snow, and a summer's heavy rains, they'd have been washed out long ago. And so they would, Jack, so they would. You're right about it. They've been made lately! They look fresh, for a fact!"

"Now you're tumbling to facts, Josh. Remember, we had a big downpour just three days ago, don't you?" Jack went on.

"Sure I do. And you're on to that, too. But I grab your meaning now, all right. There are marks here that must have been made since that rain."

"Well, what do you say about it now?" continued the boy who could read signs.

"Instead of duck shooters they're fishermen," observed Josh, calmly. "Yes, and you remember how those three boats came along, and the men in each stared so hard at us? Jack, I see it all now. We just happened in a favorite place of theirs, and they didn't like it for a cent. Why, they even tried to scare us off with that silly ghost business that gave poor old Pudding such a fright."

Jack only smiled.

"Well," he said, "suppose we follow this trail for a bit. I have an idea it will lead us to the very place where I thought I saw a moving light, like a swinging lantern, last night."

Josh was eager to keep step with him; but there was no trouble experienced in picking up the trail, so plainly marked were the tracks.

"There it is, Jack!" exclaimed Josh, suddenly; for he had been looking ahead

all the time his companion kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"It is a shanty of some sort, isn't it?" remarked Jack, without much emotion; for he had been absolutely positive as to what they would discover, so that the announcement did not excite him.

"Why, yes, a tumbledown sort of a shack," observed Josh, with a trace of disappointment about his manner. "I'd pity the fellows who spent a rainy day in such a rookery. Why, the roof is falling in at one end; and the door hangs on one rusty hinge."

Jack saw all these things as quickly as did his companion, even though he failed to cry out and express himself as vehemently as Josh took pains to do.

"Old dilapidated cabin as it is, note one thing, will you," he remarked.

"You mean that the tracks lead up to the door, is that it, Jack?"

"Well, yes," the other continued, "but just notice that there's a rusty padlock on the door. Stop and think if that doesn't look queer, considering that if anybody wanted to get in, all they'd have to do would be to knock that one hinge, and the whole door would drop flat?"

"Say, that makes me laugh, for a fact," Josh chuckled. "But it's just what you'd expect to run across up among these simple people of the border. They make me think of the ostrich. Don't you know we read the silly thing just sticks its head in a little bush, and thinks because it can't see anything that it's got a bully hiding place."

"Yes, that sort of covers the bill," said Jack. "I guess this padlock is only meant to tell people who have no business here that they are not wanted inside this shack. It stands as a warning. To enter after that would be a breach of the rights to property, as Lawyer George would say."

"Looky here, would you!" cried Josh, presently, while his companion was prowling around, and peeping through a hole in the wall, as though curious to know what the interior of the cabin looked like.

"What have you found now?" asked Jack, who was himself wondering why that new single trail had been made, coming out of the dense bushes at the back of the hut, and showing signs of recent passage, which somehow he could not help connecting with the flash of that lantern on the preceding night.

"The bally old lock don't hold even a little bit," announced Josh, as though that circumstance added to his hilarity. "See, I can lift it off with one finger. It's a fake, that's what it is, Jack. But while it might fool ordinary people, it can't a live Yankee. Now what d'ye say to going in?"

Jack laughed as though amused at the reasoning of his chum, and remarked:

"I see you think we wouldn't be breaking the law of possession if we walked

in when the lock was out of gear. That sounds nice, Josh, but many a chicken thief has found that such a plea didn't save him. But all the same, I'm going to step in and look around a bit."

"Seems to me it smells fishy around here?" observed Josh, sniffing eagerly.

"Oh! that's easy enough to explain," and Jack pointed to several heads of black bass that lay near by. "Somebody has had a fish dinner, for there is the ash bed of a fire. It may have been passing sportsmen from one of the big hotels; then again, perhaps the people who made the trail also cooked a meal or two here!"

Once inside the cabin he looked around. There was virtually nothing to see. The place had not a sign of furniture of any description. Some straw lay on the hard earthen floor, as though it might be made useful in case one wished to pass the night there.

Josh almost doubled up with laughter.

"This is sure the greatest joke ever," he remarked. "To think of trying to keep trespassers out of this old trap, just like it held all a squatter's possessions. Jack, what d'ye think the silly donkey meant by that padlock? Did he keep his stuff here once, and locked the door? I'm all in a fog."

Jack said nothing, only "browsed" around, as he expressed it, kicking the straw aside in places, only to replace it as he had found it, as though not wishing to leave any signs that trespassers had invaded the cabin of the mysterious island.

But all the while he was thinking deeply.

And once, after the laughing and scoffing Josh had stepped outside to look about him again, Jack stooped down and picked some object up off the earthen floor, which he seemed to examine with considerable curiosity before stowing away in one of his many pockets.

"Seen all you want to of the strange palace of the Thousand Islands?" asked the merry Josh, when his companion again appeared.

"Oh! yes, and I'll put the lock back just as we found it," replied the other.

Then he started to follow the plain trail that led through the dense thicket to the rear of the cabin. It took him nearly twenty minutes to zigzag through the intricate growth, for all manner of obstacles caused him to turn aside, even as they had the one who had come and gone this way on the preceding night.

When he finally reached the shore it was far around the point that jutted out above the cove where the motor boats were anchored. And after Jack had stooped down to examine the sandy beach, he arose with a peculiar smile, and a knowing shake of the head; but the only words he used as he walked along the sandy stretch near the water's edge were:

"I thought I'd find where the keel of a boat landed on this beach!"

CHAPTER XI—BUSTER GETS AN IDEA

"Find anything new worth while, Jack?" asked the cook of the *Wireless*, as he got up from the warm sand where he had been taking a sun bath, while waiting for his companion to put in an appearance.

"Oh! I don't know," replied the other, in what seemed to be a careless manner, calculated to put Josh off the track, and smother his curiosity. "One or two little things that I'm going to puzzle my wits over. But look here, the fishermen are in sight!"

"Good gracious! how you scared me, Jack!" exclaimed Josh, whirling around to look. "Honest Injun, now, I thought you meant those rough men in the three boats, and knowing how guilty we were about breaking into their shack, I started to shiver, never having been arrested, you know. But it's only George and Herb."

"They've been successful, I expect," observed Jack, wisely, "because both seem to be trying to look disappointed; but can't help glancing down in the bottom of the little dinkies. I reckon each has got a musky, all right."

"Sure we have," remarked George, as the two small boats pulled in close; "and dandies at that. Talk to me about pull; that pirate was a hummer."

"But, George, you know he didn't come up to mine," remarked Herb.

"Well, I rather guess not, Herb," grinned the other. "I suppose you notice, fellows, that my comrade has been in swimming. Funny part of it is, he never even bothered taking his clothes off when the notion struck him."

"Well, it came right sudden, for a fact," laughed Herb. "That big muskalunge was tearing around like the dickens, when swoop! he took a turn under my boat, and in my haste to swing around, I upset."

"Wow!" cried Nick, "Oh, why wasn't I there to see the fun? I'm always missing all the good things, seems to me."

"But you hung on to your rod, apparently," remarked Jack; "seeing that you got your game in the end."

"That's just what he did," declared George with sincere admiration. "You know our friend Herb has a touch of stubbornness in his make-up. No measly old musky that ever swam in the St. Lawrence was going to get the better of him in an argument. He hung to that rod even while he went under. It was the greatest thing I ever saw, for a fact; but he managed it fine, let me tell you."

"Tell us how?" begged Nick, breathlessly.

"All right," answered George. "You see, the little dinky had turned turtle when it dropped Herb out; so there it was, floating beside him, bottom-side up. Would you believe it, that fellow just climbed up over the stern, and straddled the boat as he kept on playing that fish as cool as you please."

"Great! Hurrah for our Herb! He's the champion fisherman; only, because we haven't got a photograph of that game fight to show, be careful how you tell the boys when we get home," remarked Josh.

"While he played the fish I picked up his paddle," George went on. "And when he got the musky in where I could gaff him, we pushed ashore, so he could turn his boat over again. Then, as each of us had a prize, we thought we might as well quit for the day. What you doing ashore, fellows?"

"Jack wanted to nose around, that's all," Josh hastened to say. "Found an old shack up in the woods here. Guess that spook lives there when he doesn't want to be seen. Funniest thing, though, he keeps an old rusty useless padlock on the broken door. But there wasn't anything worth while to be seen. Jack followed some tracks he found; that seemed to amuse him."

Josh went aboard, pushed the *Wireless* out, and presently the skipper joined him.

"Any other news?" asked Nick.

"Oh, yes," said Herb, stopping in the act of changing his soaked clothes for dry ones. "I forgot to say we saw that boat again."

"What's that? Do you mean the mysterious, dark, piratical craft that, believe me, ought to be flying the skull and crossbones at her stern?" demanded Nick.

"The same," Herb replied promptly. "She flashed by us while we were trolling, though at some little distance. And, fellows, as sure as you live, Clarence was at the wheel, though neither of us could see a thing of Bully Joe. I thought Clarence looked scared, for he was awful white; but George declared he was only in one of his mad fits. We know what they stand for, don't we?"

"Did you call out to him?" asked Jack, quickly.

"I did," replied George, "and dared him to accept a challenge to race the

Wireless. I thought he was going to answer me; but he only turned his head and stared. But it was Clarence, all right. I give you my word on that."

"Now, what d'ye know about that?" observed Nick; "dodging around like that, and declining to even speak! Generally Clarence is always ready enough to get into a hot argument. And you'd just think he'd be wild to take you up on that challenge business, George. It beats me all hollow, now."

"And even that ain't all," added George.

"What! more adventures?" cried the chagrined Nick. "I tell you it ain't fair for everybody to get in the lime light, and leave poor me in the lurch. What have I done to deserve this? Say, I hope you fellows ain't holding that silly thing up against me yet, about betraying our secrets to the enemy, and all that rot, you know? That would be mean."

"Oh! shucks, cut it out, Buster," said Josh; "and let George tell us what else happened. This mystery is getting on my nerves, I tell you, boys. Go on, proceed, George, old chum. Give us the harrowing details."

"You won't find much to alarm you in this," laughed the other. "Only, while we were fishing a boat came along, and it had two men in it. They rowed up close, and we could see they had a fishing rod in action. The one who held it kept watching us as sharp as the mischief. He spoke to us pleasant like, and asked a few questions about our luck, how we happened to be so far over toward the Canada side, if we expected to move away soon to new grounds, and such things."

"Did you recognize the boat, or the men, George?" asked Jack, quietly.

"Herb and myself talked that over afterwards; until his tumble overboard knocked it all out of our heads. And we thought that perhaps those men were one of those couples we saw yesterday, passing here and staring in at us."

"Say, perhaps they may have been Canadian custom officers, who patrol the river to keep American fishermen off their side," suggested Nick.

"That might be," George said. "We thought of that; but they didn't give us any warning. And besides, from the chart we've got we've learned that this island is American territory all right, you know."

"Oh! well, what's the use of bothering our heads over it," declared Herb, from inside the outing shirt he was pulling over his head.

"That's right!" cried Josh. "Fling away dull care while the sun shines, and we've got enough grub left to keep Nick here from starving to death."

When the fat boy was not looking, Josh reached down, and took hold of some object he had smuggled aboard without the others noticing the fact. It was a length of old tin waterpipe that he had found up alongside the deserted shanty, and which had evidently been useful at some time in the past, to convey the water

from the roof to a spot where it would not back into the cabin.

This old pipe was possibly six feet in length; and to the mind of a practical joker like Josh it presented some alluring possibilities.

Swinging it upward when Nick was not looking, he managed to bridge the watery gap between the *Wireless* and the *Comfort*, and quickly called in a sepulchral tone through the novel speaking-tube:

"Hello! down there! Give me connection with Buster Longfellow! I'm the ghost that walks in the night. I want to have a heart-to-heart confab with Buster!"

"What you trying to do, give me heart disease, or an attack of delirium tremens?" exclaimed Nick, who had started violently upon hearing that muffled sound so close to his ear. "Say, you don't know how queer that does go. Talk about your megaphones! That tube carries sound to beat the Dutch. I wonder now—gee!"

"Hello! What ails Pudding? Look, fellows, the poor fellow's got an idea, and it seems so strange that he don't know what to do with it!" jeered Josh.

"Huh! don't I?" replied the fat boy, whose face had turned pale, and then rosy red. "You just wait and see. Perhaps you'll say it was an inspiration some fine day. And no use to josh me about it, for I ain't going to squeal one little bit. But, oh, my! I wonder if that could just be so! This is the second time it's give me a start. If Aleck only does what I asked him!"

He stuck to his word about saying no more; and although Josh kept on teasing him for quite some time, Nick kept his lips resolutely closed on that subject.

The balance of the day passed away without anything happening that seemed out of the way. They saw nothing more of the mysterious dark boat; nor did any small craft come prowling around to have the occupants glower at them, as though begrudging them their pleasant anchorage just on the edge of that little cove.

Supper was a great success. Josh fairly outdid himself in cooking the fish, all of them going ashore on the beach to where he had made a camp fire. And afterwards they sat around, telling stories, and singing many of their favorite school songs, until the hour grew late.

When they went aboard, the night was dark; for it seemed to cloud up at sundown almost every evening now. All of them were busily employed getting their blankets arranged for sleeping, and the two who were to keep first watch had even settled down comfortably in their places; when to their ears came the sudden rapid popping that would indicate the presence of a motor boat in the near vicinity.

"Oh! look, fellows!" exclaimed Nick, as from around the point a dazzling

glow suddenly shone, bearing down rapidly straight toward them.

CHAPTER XII—YANKEE STUBBORNNESS

The most tremendous excitement reigned aboard every one of the three anchored motor boats, when it was seen that the bright white light was headed straight for them.

"He's going to smash us!" whooped Josh.

"Hey, hold off there, Clarence! Don't be a fool!" shouted George.

Herb and Nick could not find their voices at all, to make the least sign; and there was a cause for their feeling more alarmed than any of the rest. It happened that in arranging their anchorage the *Comfort* came further out than either of the other boats. Hence, she was more in direct line with the swiftly advancing speed boat than either the *Wireless* or the *Tramp*.

But if Nick could not use his tongue he certainly could use his limbs; and the way he threw himself over to the port side of the roomy *Comfort* was worth seeing. There he crouched, hugging the railing, and ready for a plunge overboard should the expected collision take place.

But just when it seemed as though the sharp prow, which they fully believed must belong to the *Flash*, was about to cut through the stern of the helpless *Comfort*, the hand at the wheel must have diverted her course just a trifle, for she shot past like an arrow, almost grazing the varnished side of the broad-beamed launch.

While that dazzling glow from the acetylene searchlight shone in their faces, none of the boys could make out anything with certainty. On comparing notes afterwards they were unable to declare whether the dim figure at the wheel was Clarence or some other; though Nick did say he heard a low chuckling laugh as the phantom boat passed, which he knew was a favorite way of expressing pleasure on the part of the Macklin boy.

"That was a close shave, sure!" remarked Jack, as coolly as he could.

They could hear the rapidly retreating rattle of the exhaust of the "pirate boat," as some of them liked to call the other craft; but as it was circling around the island, apparently, all other signs of its presence had vanished.

"Too close for comfort!" gasped Herb.

"Listen to him joking at such a time!" remarked Josh, thinking Herb meant to apply his remark to the name of the boat, when, truth to tell, that was the last thing to occur to him.

"Believe me, fellows, I confess that I'm quivering like a leaf," said Nick, "and it ain't cowardice, either. Brave men tremble after the danger is over, cravens before. You noticed that I wasn't paralyzed with fright, didn't you? I could think, and lay out a plan of escape. That proves I wasn't really scared then."

"But," declared Herb, indignantly, "whatever did they mean doing that? Why, if that sharp nose of the *Flash* had ever banged into us, going like she was, we'd have been cut in two! It's criminal, that's what, fellows!"

"Oh!" Jack remarked, "to tell the truth, I don't think Clarence would be such a fool to take such chances as that. In the first place he might kill one of us. And then again, you know, his boat would be sure to suffer, too, and might be wrecked."

"That sounds reasonable, Jack," admitted George; "but whatever do you suppose tempted him to do that crazy thing?"

"Well, he might think it a good lark," was the reply. "And then again, there may have been some other reason pushing him on, which we don't know anything about as yet. I'm going to try and think out an explanation, and if I hit a hot trail I'll tell you about it, boys."

"That means Jack's got an idea," said Nick.

"All right," spoke up Josh, instantly. "Don't think you're the only one in the bunch who can have such things, Buster."

"But what if they circle around the island, and come down booming at us again?" ventured the nervous Herb.

"I don't believe that will happen," Jack replied, seriously. "But if you feel anxious, just pull further into the cove, Herb, and he couldn't strike you then."

"I tell you what I'm going to do," declared the impulsive George. "I'm on the first watch, and I want you to let me have that Marlin scatter-gun of yours, Jack. If that fool bursts out from behind that point again, and heads for us at full speed, I declare to goodness if I don't bang away, and touch him up with bird-shot a few. He deserves such a lesson."

"But why should Clarence want to scare us away from here?" asked Nick.

That was what Jack was himself wrestling with, and he waited to find out

if any of his mates put forth an answer; but they seemed to be unable to grapple with the puzzle, for no one spoke.

"My boat is heading that way, and I'm going to light my glim. Then if he tries his funny business again, I'll spot him in good time," George remarked.

It was some time before the excitement died away. Even after those who were entitled to sleep had lain down, they would raise their heads at the least suspicious sound. Did a wavelet lap the adjacent beach, Nick was sure to bob up and look about him in alarm. When an owl started to call out "Whoo! whoo!" from a tree on the dark island, he sat up instantly, and seemed almost ready to crawl over the side of the boat into the water.

But nothing happened, and gradually silence fell upon the three anchored boats. George and Jimmie gave way to Jack and Nick when several hours had passed; and finally Herb and Josh wound up the night.

When morning came, the boys joked one another over their red eyes, showing that, after all, none of them could have secured much comforting sleep.

"I suppose we're going to pick up our mudhooks today and climb out of this?" suggested Josh, as they were enjoying breakfast.

All of them looked at Jack, who smiled.

"Suppose we put it to a vote, fellows," he said. "All those in favor of scuttling out of this, like dogs with their tails between their legs, simply because certain parties want us to move, signify it by raising their hands."

Not one went up; even Josh, who had seemed inclined that way, upon ascertaining that Nick declined to show the white feather, allowed his half raised hand to drop again.

"Contrary, no, raise their hands!"

And six of them went up like a shot.

"Do we vacate?" asked the fat boy, sarcastically, turning on Josh. "Nixey. And the more they try to scare us off, the closer we stick. Ain't it so, fellows?"

"Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute!" spoke up George, grandly.

"Remember the old story of the battle between the wind and the sun, don't you?" asked Herb, who was always bringing into play fables and yarns he had soaked in during his younger days.

"No; what was that, Herb?" asked Jack.

"Why, they got into a dispute as to which of them was the stronger, and decided to settle it on a traveler. So the wind began to blow harder and harder; but the traveler just wrapped his cloak the tighter about him. Then the sun started to try, and as it got hotter and hotter, first the traveler unfastened his cloak, and then threw it off altogether. So the bully old sun won out, after all."

"Hear! hear!" cried George; "that is a good illustration, Herb. You see, fellows, he means that we ain't going to be chased away by hard knocks and bluffing; but if some one would come and ask us politely to vacate, and give us a good reason why we ought to move along, we'd do it willingly. That's the Yankee policy."

"Then, as we're going to be here for another day, anyhow, suppose Jimmie and me take a turn after the muskies?" suggested Nick.

"It's only fair you should have a chance," Jack observed; "but you can see what risk there always is in one of the clumsy little punkin-seed boats, when handling a big fish."

"You forget that I can swim like a duck, Jack!" observed Buster, proudly.

"All the same," Jack went on, seriously, "you know you're not quite as spry as some of us; and I hope you will keep that life preserver on all the time. This water is deep, and the current makes it treacherous."

"Oh! I promise that, sure," Nick assented. "Between us, believe me, I meant to carry that bally old cork life preserver along, anyway. Jimmie might take a crab while rowing, and upset. There's no telling, you know. All right, us for the grand sport today, Jimmie. And now, post us about the place, Jack, and just how you do the business."

"Wouldn't I just give a cookie to see Buster fast to a hustler like I had on yesterday," chuckled Herb.

"Well," remarked the fat boy, coolly, "it would do you good, I guess. You'd know how to manage, after that, so as not to let a measly fish upset your boat. It takes brains to be a successful fisherman, Herb, real brains."

Jack went ashore again a little later, but none of the others seemed to care to accompany him, being satisfied to lie around, taking things easy, and talking of their future plans; for a new idea had been broached which had to do with an extended cruise up through the great lakes, rather than knock around here on the St. Lawrence for two full months; and all of them were full of suppressed excitement over it.

If Jack made any further discoveries during the time he was on the island, he did not think to take the others into his confidence when he came back; but that may have been because just then a noisy little motor boat was heading straight toward the cove, and every one was guessing what new developments were about to be sprung upon them.

CHAPTER XIII—THE GHOST HUNTER

"Wonder if this can be the same parties we met yesterday?" George remarked, as they watched the approach of the bustling little motor boat, which pushed over the water with a series of fierce explosions, not unlike the discharge of a pack of giant fire-crackers.

"No, I don't think it is," Herb spoke up, in answer. "Fellow at the wheel looks like a Canuck guide from one of the hotels, a full-blooded Indian, and the man with the glasses and the fishing rod is more like a college professor, I'd say."

"That was just what I thought," put in Jack.

"Anyway, we'll soon know, for they're coming in, as sure as anything," Josh added.

Inside of five minutes the noisy little boat swung close to where the boys sat watching. The gentleman sitting holding the rod, and winding up his reel with a clicking sound, waved a hand in cheery greeting.

"How d'ye do, boys?" he said, cordially; and somehow Jack rather liked the tone of his voice, as he also did his looks.

"Any luck, sir?" he inquired, as is the custom at such a time.

"Had two fierce strikes; but I'm afraid I've lost my cunning, for I let the beggars have a slack line, and lost both. Are you fishing any? I saw two lads in little dinkies like that one yonder, fishing over by the long island, and guessed that possibly they belonged to your party."

"Yes, they do," George replied; and went on to tell about what luck they had had, with the usual pride of a successful fisherman.

Jack meanwhile was not saying much, but observing the gentleman. It struck him that the other was trying to make himself very agreeable; and somehow he could not help remembering the fable that Herb had spoken about so

recently. Having failed to scare the motor boat boys off by stern means, were milder tactics about to be adopted now?

Presently the other thought he ought to introduce himself.

"I am Professor Herman Marshland, of Ann Arbor," he said, modestly.

So Herb started to tell just who they were, and how they happened to be knocking around on the St. Lawrence at this time.

"Have you been stopping long in this cove?" asked the other, in what he doubtless intended to have appear as a casual way; but Jack saw that he seemed to set more store by the question than surface indications would indicate.

"Why, sure, we have, Professor," George said. "We might have gone on before now, but we just hate to leave under fire, you see."

"Excuse me, but I hardly grasp your meaning, I fear," remarked the gentleman, with one of his winning smiles.

"Well, you see, some persons appear to have taken offense because we've monopolized their dandy cove here. And they've been trying in all sorts of ways to shoo us away. Last night they threatened to run us down with a speed launch that came buzzing around that point of the island there. And then, would you believe it, sir, they even went so far as to attempt to scare up-to-date American boys, by setting up a silly ghost game on us."

"What's that you say?" remarked the gentleman, interrupting George. "A ghost? Now, that's right in my line, you see. I've been making a study of all manner of strange and incomprehensible manifestations along that line for five years. In that time I've investigated dozens of so-called haunted houses. Why, you arouse my interest at once to fever heat, my young friends."

"And did you ever discover a real, genuine bona fide ghost, sir?" asked Josh.

Professor Marshland smiled.

"I never have," he replied, with a forlorn shake of the head; "but I still live in hopes. What knows but what this may be the golden opportunity I have waited for so long? You must tell me all about it, boys. And afterwards I'll just drop off and take a little look around, on my own responsibility."

Of course George and Herb were only too willing. Assisted by an occasional word from Josh, they soon told the story. Then Josh in turn related what he and Jack had found out when they investigated ashore. The college professor seemed deeply interested in the forlorn cabin, the dilapidated door of which was fastened by a broken padlock.

"They say ghosts are peculiar in many things," he remarked at the conclusion of the little talk. "And that might account for the padlock. It's all very interesting, boys. I only regret that I was not here when the manifestation occurred. Perhaps,

if I hung around tonight, the thing might get up courage enough to show again. It would repay me for all my trip here. I came for the fishing; but to catch a ghost in the act, would be positively refreshing, I assure you."

Jack was still watching the professor. While he liked the other, somehow he seemed to feel that there was something rather strange about him. He seemed to be studying the four lads as though seeking to read them, and make up his mind as to whether they were just what they claimed.

Could it possibly be that he was connected with those mysterious men who seemed so bent on chasing the motor boat boys away from the lonely island?

After chatting for some time, and making quite a favorable impression on Herb, George and Josh, the professor remarked that if they would excuse him he would step ashore, and take a look at the delightful old ghost cabin.

Josh was just about to volunteer to accompany him, when he caught the quick look Jack cast in his direction, accompanied by a negative shake of the head.

"If he wanted us he'd have said so, Josh," came in a whisper.

A minute later the gentleman, having managed to land, vanished amid the heavy growth of timber and brush.

Josh looked at Jack.

"Sure as you live, he's following that trail, Jack," he said.

"That's only natural," remarked the other, "because, you see, it was mighty plain, as though lots of people had gone back and forth."

"Yes," observed Josh, simply, "if them chaps were camping in the cabin, and going out fishing every day, of course they'd make a well-worn trail down to this cove here, where their boats must have been tied up. I've been thinking, Jack, that p'raps they're engaged in some sort of fishing that's illegal, such as setting nets against the law. Say, wouldn't that be an idea now? And if true, it must explain just why they watched us so close. They thought we might be wardens getting on the track of their business. How's that for a guess, fellows?"

"Sounds kind of fishy," remarked George.

"Scaly, I should say," Herb spoke up.

But Jack said nothing. He was thinking along the same line Josh had suggested, but in an altogether different way from the lanky cook of the *Wireless*.

To tell the truth, Jack would have been pleased could he have slipped ashore to observe what the professor from Ann Arbor could be doing just then; but he did not dare venture. It would look too much like impudence. As he himself had said, if the gentleman had wished for their company, he certainly must have asked them to go ashore with him.

As to his being deeply interested in ghosts, and a patient investigator of

remarkable manifestations for years, Jack took all that with a grain of salt. Perhaps it might be so, but Jack believed he was not far wrong in believing that Professor Marshland had only mentioned the fact to excuse his evident desire to go ashore and look around.

He was gone a long while. Indeed, Jack guessed that perhaps the gentleman could have explored the whole island in the time that elapsed before he again showed up. Still, there was also a chance that he might have been doing something in connection with the old cabin.

When he did appear he was smiling broadly.

"Sorry to say I couldn't find any evidence of the supernatural," he remarked, in answer to the eager look Josh gave him as he clambered aboard his stubby little boat once more. "And that inclines me to the belief that some one who loves a practical joke was only trying to throw you into a state of fright, boys. I regret, too, that I cannot remain over a night with you, in the hope of being granted a look at this wonderful spectre. If anything more remarkable occurs, I'd be very much obliged if one of you would write an account of it and mail me at the college."

"Sure, we will, Professor," said the willing Josh. "And if so be we capture that flickering ghost, we'll send it to you by express, charges collect."

"Do so," laughed the gentleman. "I won't object, I assure you. Well, here's wishing you luck, boys. And thank you for all the information you've given. It may be of more assistance to me in my calling than you imagine. Start up, John. It's back to the hotel for us now."

So the noisy little motor went chugging away, passing around the point; and by degrees the sound died out, as other islands came between.

"Say, let me tell you, I like that man," Josh up and said, without any urging.

"He is a smart one, all right, and don't you forget it," remarked George.

"Was he really trolling, do you suppose, in that horrible, noisy power boat?" asked Herb, skeptically.

Jack himself had a suspicion that the rod and line were only being used for a mask of some sort. Everywhere he looked, the mystery seemed to be getting deeper. First the strange actions of the men in the rowboats; then the appearance of that foolish ghost on the island; the questioning of the fisherman whom George and Herb had met while away on the preceding day; the peculiar things he himself had discovered ashore; and now, last but not least, the coming of this pretended fisherman, who asked skillful questions, and made out to be a genuine ghost hunter—taking all these things together, and it can be seen that Jack had about all he wanted to ponder over for the rest of that day.

CHAPTER XIV—A STRANGE RIDE

"Time those two fellows were showing up, don't you think, Jack?" asked Josh, as the noon hour came around.

"Oh! I don't know," replied the other. "I noticed that Nick carried a bundle with him, and guessed it might be a little snack to keep off starvation, in case they were detained. Sometimes it's hard to give up, when you are fishing, you know."

"Snack!" echoed Josh, with a sniff of scorn. "Well, I wish you'd seen just what that elephant did roll up in that paper. Herb wasn't looking, but I kept an eye on Buster. Snack! Say, take it from me, that he had as much as I would eat in a week of Sundays."

"Well," laughed Jack, "you're prejudiced against poor Buster, you know, Josh. Just because you have a bird's appetite, and he that of a hog, you pick on him. His greed is his only weak spot. His heart is as big as a bushel basket; and he'd go out of his way any time to do you a good turn."

"Oh! I know it, all right, Jack," returned the other. "You mustn't take everything I say for what it stands. But listen, fellows. Talk of the angel, and you hear the rustle of its wings. Unless I miss my guess, that's the tuneful voice of Buster right now. What in the dickens can he be shouting that way for?"

All of them were on their feet by now, and listening to the yells.

"They seem to be coming from around the island," said Jack.

"I bet you it's Jimmie having some fun with poor Pudding. He does like to hear him put up a howl," chuckled Herb.

"Well, I don't know about that, fellows. Just listen, and hear what he seems to be saying. Perhaps, after all, there may be something crooked about it. We seem to be up to our necks in all sorts of queer mysteries, you know."

George was not smiling when he said this; indeed, all of them could now

realize that there was something of appeal and alarm in connection with the lusty yells Buster was letting loose.

"Hey! stop it, you! What d'ye mean trying to drown me? Let up, I tell you! Can't you give a feller a chance? Somebody head me off, won't you? Help! help!"

"There he comes!" shouted Jack, pointing.

"Well, what under the sun is he doing?" cried Herb.

"Since when did Buster put a motor in his dinky?" asked George, feebly.

"And ain't he just making the time, though?" ejaculated Josh. "Just look at the way the foam flies up before the blunt bow of the dinky!"

Jack looked again and then gave a shrill laugh.

"Motor!" he exclaimed. "The only motor Buster is dealing with now has got fins and scales, and is in the water. Don't you see what he's doing, boys? He got a whooping big muskalunge at the end of his line. In some way Buster has got the line twisted around his body. And there he sits in the dinky, bracing his feet against a knee of the boat, and holding on for dear life, while the fish runs away with him."

Then the others burst into a loud laugh, seeing the comical side of it. To Buster it was not so funny, however. He had been straining so long now that he fancied he might be pulled over the side of the cranky little snub-nosed craft any time; and with that cord wrapped around his arms, drowned because of his inability to swim, despite the cork life preserver.

"Quit your laughing, and chase after us, fellows," he bawled, as he shot past the mouth of the cove; and at the same time sending a mute look of appeal toward his mates.

"Why don't you get out your knife and cut loose?" shouted George, making use of his hands in lieu of a megaphone.

"Can't move—got my arms tied down at my sides. Ouch! it hurts, for the line is cutting into the bone of my wrists. Come and help me before it's too late. You'll be sorry if I get drowned. Then you'll never learn the truth of how our secrets leaked. I'm the only one who is on the track. Hurry up, boys; I mean it!"

Jack saw that after all the situation was more desperate than might have appeared at first sight. It must be an enormous fish, the grandfather of all the muskies around the Thousand Islands, and powerful enough to drown poor Nick, if once it succeeded in upsetting the boat, or dragging him out of it.

Accordingly he immediately jumped over, and unfastened the cable that held his anchor.

"Hold that for me, will you, Herb?" he said, tossing one end of the rope over to the skipper of the *Comfort*.

Then without any further delay he started his engine with one energetic fling of the wheel.

Immediately the boat started, amid a rattling fusillade of sharp reports that told how responsive the well equipped motor was to the demands of its master.

Of course, once Jack fairly started after the little dinky that was being so vigorously towed by the captive fish, he had no difficulty in overtaking it.

"Now keep a firm hold on your seat, Buster," he said. "I'm going to push in ahead of you, and see if I can fasten on to that line myself. The big thing can't well pull both boats. After that I'll free your arms. I want you to pull him in by yourself, if possible."

"Not me!" cried Buster. "I'm done with the brute. Shoot him dead. Hit him with a club. He's a villain, a desperate villain, because he wound me up like this, and then tried his level best to yank me over. Jack, bless you, I believe you've saved me from a watery grave. Have you got him now? Are you real certain he can't jump into my little boat and take a chunk out of my leg? Oh, my! what a puller! I was sure going a mile a minute that time. Talk about Neptune and his sea horses, they can't ever come up to a pesky muskalunge that feels the barb of the hook. I'm all tired out, Jack. You finish him, please."

Jack saw that this was so; and having untangled the line from Nick's body, he took the rod and proceeded to get in touch with the now sulking monster.

Nick clambered aboard the motor boat in a hurry, as though really afraid that the fish in its anger might leap into the shallow dinky to bite him.

"Glory! just look at him jump and kick, would you?" shouted Nick, as the baffled captive sprang from the water, shaking its massive head furiously in an effort to dislodge the hook, which, however, was too securely placed by this time in the hard bone of its mouth to be shaken out. "He's trying to locate me, that's what! Let me have that gun of yours, Jack. Next time he jumps I'm going to pot him sure."

And he did.

As a rule Nick was a poor shot. Whether luck entered into it, or his fear that the big fish was meaning to climb in after him, stirred him to unusual exertions, Jack never knew; but as he leaped into the air, not twenty feet away, there was a tremendous bang close beside Jack, and he saw the muskalunge drop back into the water as though fairly riddled with shot.

Poor Nick also tumbled over backwards, and lay there grunting and rubbing his head; for he had in his excitement pulled both triggers at the same time, so that a double discharge had followed.

"D-d-did I g-get him, Jack?" gasped the fat boy.

"Deader than a door nail or Julius Caesar!" laughed the other, as he began to draw in the line hand over hand; for there was no longer any positive resistance from the object at the other end.

"Look out! Be careful, Jack," warned poor Nick, in fresh alarm. "You don't understand how treacherous one of these muskies can be. 'Twouldn't surprise me if he was playing 'possum right now. Throw him in the dinky when he comes along. Let him bite a chunk out of that with his old teeth if he wants to. I wouldn't touch him for anything now."

"Oh! you'll enjoy a steak from the same old hooker tonight, never fear. But he's dead as a herring, Buster. And what a monster! None of the rest of us are in it with you after this. I bet he weighs all of thirty-five pounds!"

By degrees, when he really saw that the big fish was dead, Nick recovered his courage; and by the time they drew up in the cove he was swelling with importance over the wonderful degree of success that had attended his maiden effort at capturing a muskalunge.

True, Josh was mean enough to elevate his eyebrows when Nick spoke of it that way, and hint that he had imagined that the shoe was on the other foot, in that the fish had captured Nick; but the other gave him a withering look as he said scornfully:

"Now, what d'ye know about that, fellows? This simple guy actually believes I was in earnest when I let that fine and dandy fish at the end of my line tow me for half a mile. Why, silly, didn't you take notice that I drove him like you might a horse? Didn't we come in a bee line for this very cove? Give me a little credit, won't you? Be fair and square. I know it's an effort for you, but when you're in the company of gentlemen you ought to brace up and try hard to act like one, Josh."

Of course that took all the wind out of Josh's sails; he could only sit there, mumbling to himself, shaking his head, and casting occasional looks toward Nick, as though inclined to give him the banner when it came to nerve.

Then came Jimmie, laboring furiously with his paddle, and excited because he did not know whatever could have become of his fisherman companion, whom last he saw flying off in a mysterious fashion, and yelling for help as though the ghost of the island had indeed laid hold of him; since Jimmie could not see what amazing power it was causing the dinky to rush through the water five times as fast as he could urge his own craft.

CHAPTER XV—ANOTHER NIGHT

Of course the whole story had to be told over again for the benefit of Jimmie. The Irish lad found some little difficulty in swallowing Nick's bold assertion that he might have been setting up a little game for the amusement of his companions. He even went so far as to poke the defunct fish in the side with his finger and pretend to ask the captive if it were really so.

"But look here, Jack and Herb and George, let's have some lunch!" finally remarked Josh, naming the three who had remained at home, with malice in his manner.

Nick fell into the trap, sprawling.

"Now, I like that!" he observed with a deeply injured expression on his red and fat face. "Just listen to him, would you? He cuts poor old Jimmie and me out of the call. Say, don't you think we ever eat?"

Josh pretended to be astonished, and threw up his hands to indicate as much.

"Eat?" he cried. "Well, what's to hinder you from getting out that big lunch you took away with you? We can spare you a cup of coffee to wash it down, I guess, hey, fellows?"

Then the two returned fishermen stared at each other.

"What are you talking about, Josh?" said Nick. "That little snack we carried off with us, is it? Oh! say, you don't count that, do you? Why, Jimmie and me, we got nippy about nine o'clock and punished that off. Why, I'm just about starved right now, if you want to know it. Bring on your grub, unless you want to see me faint dead away."

Josh had had his little fun, and knew that it would do no good to draw it out any longer; so grumbling about the "rise in the cost of living," he proceeded to comply with the demand.

Of course there was enough; Josh had seen to that in the beginning. Indeed, it would have been a highly dangerous proceeding for any one entrusted with the cooking arrangements of the party not to consider the enormous capacity of Nick and Jimmie, when laying out provisions for a meal.

Naturally enough the conversation soon took on an interesting color.

"How long are we going to stick right here in this cove?" Josh asked, as he sat curled up on a seat, enjoying a platter of Boston baked beans, with which some frizzled dried beef had been heated up.

"Yes," added Herb, "that's a subject we ought to consider. It's all very fine to be enjoying the fishing and the wonderful stunts of Buster at harnessing the finny tribes as horses; but you know, fellows, we came here to the St. Lawrence to cruise, not squat on our haunches. Jack, it's up to you. Tell us."

"I've been thinking right along that it must be getting rather monotonous to some of you," said Jack, slowly. "Only for the fact that we've been badgered by some unknown parties who want to chase us off, we'd have gone before now. But it does seem a shame to lose so much time in this way. Tell you what I propose, boys."

"Glad to hear it. Let's know!" several of the others cried in unison; for somehow what Jack thought right usually appealed to the rest; because in the past as a leader he had often been tried and never found wanting.

"All right," the other went on. "Suppose we put in just one more night here in this anchorage. Then some time tomorrow, no matter what happens, we'll pull out. How does that suit you, fellows?"

"I'm agreeable," George immediately replied.

"Suits me from the ground up," Herb put in.

Three others added their voices after the same fashion, so that in this amiable way the question was settled without the least friction.

"That means another night of guard duty," mused Nick; whereupon Josh burst out into a harsh laugh.

"Hear him, comrades all!" he remarked. "The poor fellow is worn out with his arduous work. No wonder he drops off into slumber-land when on duty. He is so near a living skeleton that even a poor lone little minnow can pull him and his boat along by the mile. Some of us ought to volunteer to take Buster's place, and let him get about fifteen hours of sleep. He needs it."

Nick only grinned, not at all abashed.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Suppose you start the ball rolling then, Josh. How long will you carry me on your stretch—half an hour? That would count for something. I think I might gain an ounce of flesh on the strength of that extra sleep."

"I think you would, all of it," said Josh. "The trouble with you, Buster, is that you take life too easy. That's why you get so fat. Just keep on and see where you land pretty soon. Remember Mr. Amos Spofford, will you, and take warning."

"Now, that's what I call a mean dig on your part, Josh," complained Nick. "Talk to me about the strenuous life; did you ever know anybody have a bigger job than I did today, landing that giant muskalunge? When I go in for anything I do it with my whole heart, don't I boys?"

"You sure do, Pudding," assented George, "and with your whole stomach, too."

Nick only gave him a reproachful look, as though it pained him to receive this unexpected blow in the house of his friends.

"Then it's settled we leave here tomorrow?" remarked Herb, meaning to cast oil on the troubled waters; for Herb was by nature a peacemaker.

"Unless something unexpected crops up that might hold us back," said Jack.

"What could do that?" asked Josh, uneasily, for he wanted to get away from the vicinity of the haunted island as speedily as possible.

"Oh! one of the engines might break down, for instance," laughed the other.

"Now I know that was meant for me," retorted George; "but, thank you, the bully old *Wireless* seems to be on her best behavior this trip. Haven't had the least trouble up to now, and don't expect to. Wish I could only get a chance to race that *Flash* of Clarence's, though. Never will be happy till I do, and find out whether his boat or mine is the faster."

"Look out yonder, fellows," said Josh just then.

"A rowboat, and holding two men," remarked Jack. "Seems to me we've seen those fellows before, eh, boys?"

"We certainly have," George spoke up. "They are some of the ones who passed here the other day and scowled to beat the band. They're doing the same right now, as if they'd like to order us away, but don't dare. Guess they've come around to see if we show any signs of leaving. Look at 'em talking together, and shaking their heads. Perhaps it means more trouble for us tonight, boys."

"Mebbe the ould ghost has been patched up again for a sicond show!" suggested Jimmie, grinning at Josh, who had turned a bit pale, and moved uneasily.

"Well, there they go off without saying a single word to us. Talk about your good manners, these fishermen along the St. Lawrence are a lot of soreheads," and George mockingly waved his hand after the retreating boat, though Jack considered his act as bordering on the reckless.

"George, suppose you and I go ashore after a while, and shoot at a mark a few times with that rifle of yours?" Jack suggested later on.

"Now you've got some notion in your head, or you wouldn't say that," remarked George. "Tell us what it is, Jack."

"Only this," replied the other, without hesitation. "Some of those men may be hanging about within earshot. We don't know but what they have a camp on the island here or some other close by. It might be as well to let them know we've got a gun and can shoot if necessary. Is that straight?"

"It's what you would call good and sufficient warning, in law," George replied. "And I call it a bright thought, Jack. Let's start now. I challenge you to a trial of skill with my rifle. And Josh here can go along to keep tally."

"Please excuse me," retorted the party mentioned. "But I've got plenty to attend to right here. Try Nick; the exercise will do him good."

"All right!" exclaimed the fat boy, promptly. "I'm on deck every time. You never knew me to shirk; even if some of you did allow terrible suspicions to creep into your minds about my entire trustworthiness. But in good time I expect to clear up that dark mystery of the past. I can afford to wait my time; the triumph will be all the sweeter. Shall I tumble into your dinky, Jack?"

So the three went ashore, and for some time the rivalry was keen, the sharp reports of the rifle sounding at intervals, accompanied by more or less shouting and merriment. As Jack said, they might as well notify everybody within earshot of the fact that even the appearance of a ghost had not frosted their spirits to any appreciable extent.

So the afternoon gradually passed away.

Josh often cast apprehensive glances toward the silent shore of the nearby island as the shadows grew longer, with night coming on. Sometimes he fancied he saw something moving amid the thick brush, and was almost inclined to tell his comrades; only he feared their shouts of derision, and the accusation that he allowed memories of that silly ghost to haunt him.

And after all, it usually turned out that the moving object was some innocent little denizen of the woods, a prowling 'coon perhaps, out ahead of time in search of a supper; or possibly only a chipmunk searching for tempting roots to satisfy its desire for food, while waiting for the new crop of nuts to come along.

Night settled down at last, and this time the boys were pleased to note that the heavens were almost clear, so that the moon would have a fair chance to play hide and seek with the few floating white banks of clouds.

Most of the boys seemed in high spirits. They laughed and joked as they went about the usual duties of the evening hour. If Jack had anything serious on his mind he failed to take his comrades into his confidence. And yet, now and then he would smile, as though certain thoughts that pushed themselves to the

front amused him; and this seemed to be the case more especially when he heard the others talking about the pleasant professor from Ann Arbor.

CHAPTER XVI—JACK'S DARING VENTURE

Somehow no one suggested having supper ashore that night. There was something chilling about the mysterious island that dampened the ardor of the boys in this respect. Had it been anywhere else, they would have looked upon the opportunity for having a jolly camp fire as too good to be lost; but somehow all seemed satisfied that they remain aboard.

Josh for one was just as well pleased. He even neglected several golden chances to give Nick those customary sly digs; and this was a most unusual thing for Josh.

Nevertheless, even the proximity of a haunted island could not long hold in check the natural bubbling spirits of a pack of healthy lads. After supper, as they lay around in as comfortable attitudes as was possible, some one started singing, and presently six voices took up the chorus, so that a volume of sound welled up out of that cove calculated to startle all the ghostly visitants that were ever known to gather there.

No one seemed to be sleepy; for even when the hour began to grow late there was little talk of getting out the blankets. Stories were told, jokes flew around, and taken in all they were a merry group, apparently without a single care in the wide world.

George broke into this delightful harmony finally by saying:

"Now, I guess you fellows will tell me I'm hearing things that ain't so; but, honest, I believe that was the chug-chug of a motor that came down the wind. It was just as Nick was singing that funny song of his about the Dutchman who didn't know his own name, because he and his twin brother got mixed in the cradle, and the other fellow died. Did anybody else get the sound, or are my ears the only sharp ones?"

"I thought I did," Jack spoke up; "but you see, Nick was leaning over the side of his boat and sending his voice right at me, so I couldn't make sure."

Herb also admitted that he had heard something, he couldn't say what.

"Now, don't laugh," George went on; "but it struck me I'd heard that rackety chug before."

"Meaning the noisy engine of that stubby little boat the Ann Arbor professor came in?" asked Jack, quietly.

"You hit it right at the first jump, Jack, for that was in my mind," George said.

"Well," remarked Nick, "don't you remember that he said he'd like to spend one night with us here, in hopes of seeing our pet ghost. Perhaps he's concluded to return and do it."

"Oh, rats;" exclaimed Josh, "We ain't going to see any more ghost. What's the use of keeping that silly idea up? But I reckon all of us'd like to see that gentleman again. He was good company, and he knows boys from the ground up."

"He ought to, seeing that it's his business to be with boys and young men all the time. I bet you he's a prime favorite at college," Nick remarked; and then looked in surprise at Jack because the other actually chuckled.

"I don't believe Jack takes much stock in Professor Marshland," said George, who had also noticed this little demonstration.

"Oh; but you're very much mistaken there," the one indicated hastened to say. "I admired him and hope some time to see more of him. I think we shall before we leave the St. Lawrence cruising grounds."

George shook his head. He seemed to guess that there might be a hidden meaning back of these words; but if so, it was beyond his capacity to fathom it.

"But look here, if he's coming along, why don't we hear his old boat any more?" Josh asked.

"That's so," declared George. "I wonder, now, if the engine could have broken down."

At that everybody smiled, for in their Mississippi cruise it had been George who was frequently in trouble through the inability of his motor to stand the strain of great pressure. And consequently the subject was usually one that was frequently on his mind.

"Oh! the chances are that he was just going past, and has gotten beyond hearing. You know sometimes a flaw in the wind will carry a sound for a mile or two," Jack remarked.

"That's so, on the water," George observed.

A little later, while the others were engaged in some wordy dispute, Jack quietly slipped into the little tender attached to the *Tramp* and paddled softly off out of the cove.

"What d'ye suppose he's got on his mind?" asked George, looking after the other.

"Give me something easy," replied Nick. "Jack always is a puzzle for me. He has such bright thoughts I don't just seem able to grapple with 'em. But depend on it, he's thinking of something right now."

"I guess he's worrying about those men," suggested Josh.

"Oh! I don't think so," George hastened to say. "They wouldn't dare try attack us here, you know. It would be a breach of the law for which they could be sent to prison for years. Jack's got some other notion in his brain, believe me."

Meanwhile the object of all this speculation idly paddled a little distance out on the moonlit water, and sat there in his small craft, as though enjoying the silvery glow.

He looked around him on all sides, and particularly in that quarter of the wind from whence had come the faint "chug-chug" of a motor's eccentric pulsations. But nothing could be seen save the dim outlines of the next island.

After a while, as a cloud covered the moon, Jack came back and clambered aboard once more.

"Here, is this an all-night session of the club?" he asked. "Already it's ten minutes after eleven. If you fellows want to get any sleep tonight, better be turning in right now. Josh and myself have the first two hour watch, you understand."

Accordingly there was a breaking up of the conference; goodnights were exchanged, and those who had drawn the first spell of rest crept into their comfortable blankets.

Of late their sleep had been somewhat broken, as we happen to know, what with the coming of specters and such things. On this account every one of the four soon dropped off asleep.

Jack could hear Jimmie breathing heavily in less than ten minutes. Apparently Jack had something on his mind, for leaning over toward where he could see Josh sitting he asked in a low tone:

"How is it there, Josh; is Herb asleep yet?"

"I guess he must be," came the answer; "because he's snoring to beat the band, even if he don't make much noise."

"That's where you made a mistake, for it's Nick doing that. Listen again, and you'll see I'm right. And George was yawning when he turned in, so I reckon he's gone over the border, too."

"What do you want to know for?" asked Josh, aware that Jack must have some reason for asking such a question.

"I'll tell you, Josh. I mean to go ashore soon," replied the skipper of the *Tramp*.

"Thunder! do you really mean it, Jack?" queried Josh, taken aback; for it would have to be something tremendous that could tempt him to set a foot on that same island in the night time.

"Listen, Josh," Jack went on.

"I am, with all my ears, so go right on," the other sent back over the few feet of water separating the two boats they occupied.

"I didn't say anything about it to the rest, Josh, but I think I saw a gleam of that lantern ashore a while back. And I'd like to investigate a little."

"Oh, my! you wouldn't catch me trying it," declared Josh, with an intake of breath that told of suppressed excitement. "But will you take your gun along?"

"Perhaps I'd better, though I don't really expect to use it," Jack replied. "Because, you see, ghosts can't be reached with common lead pellets. But I want you to help me Josh."

"Me? Oh! please don't ask me to go along, Jack. That lame foot of mine has been hurting again like anything, and I'm that clumsy I might tumble all over myself and give the thing away."

"Oh, shucks! I don't mean that," Jack replied. "But when that big cloud sails over the moon I want to slip into my little dinky here, and paddle quietly ashore. I'll hand you the rope I've got tied to the stern; and when you feel that shake three times, pull the boat out again, and let it float with yours. Understand?"

"Yes, yes. And I'll do it all right, never fear. If it wasn't for that plagued lame foot, now, Jack."

"Let up on that, please. Now, look out, there she goes under."

Even as Jack spoke the moon said goodbye to the world for a short time, and hid her smiling face behind a cloud that was darker than any that had thus far sailed across the starry heavens on this particular night.

Being all ready, Jack crept into the small tender, gun in hand. He pushed alongside the Wireless and managed to pass the end of a rope to Josh, who was waiting to receive the same.

Gently the paddle was wielded, and the little "punkin-seed of a boat," as the boys sometimes termed the dinkies, was noiselessly wafted shoreward. Landing, Jack shifted his person to the sand, and then gave the requisite number of tugs at the rope, after which he shoved the boat off.

He knew that Josh would attend to all that part of the business, and gave it

no further heed. Indeed, he had all he wanted to take care of in following out the rather venturesome plan of campaign he had arranged.

For somehow Jack was of the opinion that the mystery of the island was to be revealed to any one daring enough to go ashore and investigate, which was just what he had determined to do.

CHAPTER XVII—THE SECRET OUT

Out came the moon again, sailing into a clear field.

But Jack no longer stood there on the little beach. He had taken time by the forelock, and slipped among the rank growth; so that although Josh strained his eyes to the utmost, not the faintest sign of his comrade did he discover.

Jack's idea, of course, was to reach the vicinity of that tumbledown shack. In his mind, that must be the central point of interest in the game. He fully believed, though he had not mentioned the fact to the rest, that the attempt to frighten the boys off with such a ridiculous show of a pretended spirit waving them away, was meant to cover this cabin.

What did it all mean? Why should any man, or set of men, wish to keep others from prowling around that rickety building? Surely, any one with common sense would hardly think to occupy it for a night's refuge. The open air would be far more preferable in every way.

Still, Jack was positive that there was something in connection with this same cabin that moved the unknown parties to endeavor to influence an early departure on the part of the motor boys.

And he wanted to know what that mystery might be.

That was why he had come ashore so silently. It also accounted for his creeping along through the bushes as carefully as he knew how, avoiding the trail which he and Josh had followed on that other occasion.

It took him considerable time to draw near the vicinity of the cabin, because he wanted to go without making any noise; and he was not positive but that hostile eyes and ears might not be on the alert.

Twice some sudden little sound close by had sent a thrill of alarm through his heart. But nothing followed, and he realized that these noises must have been

made by some little animal, disturbed in his retreat by the creeping past of the intruder.

Jack had made a discovery before he was more than half way between the beach of the cove and the cabin. There was a light inside the old building! He could see little glimpses of it through what must be holes in the walls, where the chinks between the logs were open, the mud having fallen away in the process of decay.

And as Jack said to himself with a chuckle, ghosts did not, as far as he knew, need lanterns in their business.

Finally the boy found himself close to the side of the cabin. With his heart beating like a trip-hammer, he crept to the first little gap in the wall, and glued his eyes to the aperture.

What he saw was nothing so very astonishing. A man stood inside the cabin, holding a lantern. He was not doing anything, and seemed to be waiting for some other person.

"One of the fellows in that boat today," was what Jack immediately said to himself, as he fastened his eyes on the bearded face.

Even inexperienced as he was, Jack fancied that there was something of a desperate type about the man's countenance. He did not seem to be such a man as one was apt to trust on sight—like that jolly professor from Ann Arbor, for instance.

But what on earth could the man be doing here? He did not seem to have any sort of bundles with him, as might have been expected. Once Jack was made to shiver just a trifle, when he saw the fellow take out a pistol, and handle it with a grin of pleasure on his face.

Jack was beginning to see light. This could not be simply the ordinary desire of some fishermen who disliked seeing strangers occupying a cove they had come to look upon as theirs by right of previous use.

And this man he now saw had none of the characteristics of a rough fisherman. He was rather nattily dressed, and would pass for a gentleman in a crowd. The mystery seemed to grow more dense; but as it is always darkest just before dawn, so Jack believed that he must be on the point of seeing daylight appear in this matter.

By chance he raised his eyes a trifle. Perhaps some little movement may have attracted him—he never knew. But again he was thrilled to discover a face pressed against the broken pane of glass forming the sole window on the opposite wall.

It was the strange gentleman who had claimed to be a college professor. He

did not wear his nose glasses now, and doubtless the look of culture had given way to one of an entirely different nature; but Jack knew he could not be mistaken.

Nor was he so very much surprised, come to think of it. He had half anticipated something of this sort, at the time he heard what seemed to be the peculiar chug! chug! of the noisy motor belonging to that snub-nosed boat. The professor had indeed come back to the haunted island; nor had he thought it advisable to inform his new boy friends of his return.

Had Josh been there to see, he must have surely jumped to the conclusion that it was his wild desire to set eyes on a ghost that had lured the professor back.

Jack looked at the matter from an entirely different standpoint. He, for instance, did not believe that the gentleman was one-half so much interested in mysterious visitations from departed spirits as he was in the movements of certain persons who might be engaged in a trade that shunned the light of day, because it was by nature evil, and in defiance to the laws.

And this party who stood there, holding that lantern and waiting, was evidently something in the line of a leader.

Only for a brief space of time did the so-called professor remain at that broken window; then he vanished from the view of the watching boy. But it gave Jack considerable satisfaction and confidence just to know that Herman Marshland was near by.

Already he had his hand upon the solution of the whole puzzle that had been eluding his best efforts up to now. And just like Columbus discovering America, it was so exceedingly simple, once you knew how, that Jack silently laughed at himself for not having grasped the prize answer before now.

Smugglers, that was what the rough-looking men in the boats were! This must be a central point with them, where for some time they had secretly landed the goods ferried over from the nearby Canadian shore. Here on American territory they were perhaps secreted until such favorable opportunity arrived to send them further afield into the sovereign State of New York, when all trace of them would be lost to any government agents who might be prowling around on the lookout for such law-breakers.

Since coming to the St. Lawrence the boys had heard more or less about such a class of persons, who made it their business to try and evade the revenue men. In some cases it was Chinamen they shipped across the border, receiving so much per head to get them into the protected country. Then again it meant laces, diamonds, silks, anything that was small in dimensions, but upon which the government at Washington levied a heavy toll.

Pleased with having guessed the secret, Jack could not think of slipping

away. It might be none of his business what these bold and bad men were doing; but somehow he could not help feeling a deep interest in the movements of the man who had visited them that very afternoon, and made such a hit with the boys.

Of course the pretended college professor must really be one of those sagacious revenue men, engaged in running these rascals to earth.

Besides, the "professor" might need help, and Jack was of a mind to render such a service if the chance came. A strange freak of fortune seem to have thrown them in contact with these warring factions; and while some timid people might consider it the height of folly for any one of the boys to take sides, Jack's bold spirit would never allow of his standing there and seeing the man who represented law and order outclassed.

He half expected to see the "professor" step into the cabin through the doorway, and call upon the unknown man to surrender. But then, as there was as yet no evidence of crime, possibly a cautious revenue agent would be apt to hold his horses and await further developments.

A sound came faintly to the ears of the crouching lad—voices of several persons, and approaching the cabin at that.

Jack dared not keep his position, with his eye glued to the crack; there was a chance that he might be discovered; and so, although he wanted to look more than ever, he dropped flat upon the earth and waited.

At any rate, he had made no mistake about others approaching, for presently he knew they had entered the cabin. After that he ventured to look again. Yes, two rough-looking fellows had entered, and were already conversing in low but eager tones with the one who had waited for their coming.

Seeing was all very well, but just then Jack thought that if he could only hear what was passing between these fellows he would have the last bit of fog cleared away. To this end he clapped his ear against the side of the cabin at the very point where the mud had fallen, leaving a hole in the chinks between the logs.

Nor was he mistaken when he believed he might pick up some of the words passing between the men. The two newcomers seemed more or less worried about something, and kept urging delay; but the leader would have none of it, apparently.

"Antoine," he said, gruffly, "you go and watch the three boats lying in the cove. If there's any sign of life about them, come back and warn us. We must get those goods ashore tonight. It's too risky holding them any longer. And one of the cubs might break away, to inform on us. That would ruin all. Bart, you be off and start things moving this way. I know the new trail is rough and long, but it

can't be helped. Next time we'll have things back the old way again. These kids ain't going to hold on much longer. Now, both of you be off!"

CHAPTER XVIII—THE ESCAPE

When the tall leader spoke in that stern voice, evidently his men knew better than to put up any further complaint. They both passed out, and Jack could hear Antoine making his way down the broad trail to gain a point where, hidden himself, he could still watch the trio of modern motor boats, and discover the first indication of any desire on the part of the crews to come ashore.

It was surely growing very interesting. Jack felt that he was being treated to a real life drama of the most thrilling description. When the boys decided to come to the St. Lawrence river for their summer outing, not one among them dreamed that before they left that region of many islands they would have run up against a series of strange adventures well worthy of being given a place in the log of the motor boat club.

Indeed, all the trouble they had anticipated was possibly frequent ructions with Tricky Clarence and his side partner, Bully Joe Brinker.

At thought of the two a sudden idea seemed to flash through the mind of Jack. He remembered the event of the dark boat, when Herb and Dick were given such a fright. At the time he had wondered whether Clarence, on his own account, could have ventured to dash by at full speed, and come within an ace of smashing into the Comfort. The new idea was along the line that perhaps the two boys might have fallen into the hands of the smugglers, who were using the Flash to suit their evil purposes!

It was so stunning a thought that Jack felt his very breath taken away. Yet after all was there anything utterly improbable about it? These men must be daring after their fashion. They were being hunted all the time by shrewd government agents; and consequently must adopt new methods of carrying on their business.

And if it were indeed true, would it not account for many things—the white

face of Clarence at the time he passed the boys who were fishing—his refusal to even answer the wave of the hand they gave him—he may have been in no position at the time to appear jovial, or even half-way friendly.

Voices again!

Jack moved up to his crack, prepared to see all there was going on. Such a glorious opportunity did not come across the path of most fellows, off on their summer vacation; and he ought to improve the golden chance to the limit.

It would be folly not to admit that the boy was trembling as he crouched there, for he never denied the fact himself. But after all it was more the excitement of the adventure than any bodily fear on his part that caused this.

He had hardly settled himself comfortably when through the doorway came a stooping figure. It was a man bearing a package on his back. This he deposited on the earthen floor, and turned to assist a second fellow whose bundle seemed of even larger dimensions than the first.

One of them had also fetched a shovel along, which had a long handle. This the leader seized upon eagerly, and commenced digging in a certain corner, first removing the accumulated straw, which was apparently used as a means for hiding signs of recent disturbance.

Jack's eyes grew hot with straining at the little crack; but he could not draw himself away; it was all so thrilling, so picturesque, that he must continue to look, no matter what the discomfort.

Now, the man with the shovel had succeeded in arriving at what seemed to be the lid of a large box. He lifted this, and one of the men tossed his bundle into a yawning aperture.

Here the stuff would lie unsuspected, until some time when the opportunity seemed ripe to dispose of it, when the deal would be completed.

Jack wondered what could be in those packages; undoubtedly something of particular value, since these men would never venture to take such chances of capture for a trifling gain.

He also found himself guessing whether the strange "professor," whom he now knew to be a government agent, could be watching all these operations from some other friendly crack across the way.

What would he do? Having witnessed all he wished, would the other attempt to arrest these fellows? Since there seemed to be something like half a dozen of the smugglers it hardly seemed likely he would go to such extremes. Possibly he might be satisfied to capture the spoils, after the men had departed; and trust to future good fortune to arrest the delinquents later on.

One of the men left the cabin, probably to return to the upper end of the

island, where the boat lay from which these packages of goods had been carried. He was in an ugly humor, judging from his manner. The stubborn way in which the motor boat boys stuck to that cove was giving these worthies a tremendous lot of unnecessary work; and it was no wonder they felt badly disposed toward Jack and his chums.

Five minutes later the second man was sent off, leaving the leader there to finish up the job of smoothing off the earth and replacing the broken straw as before.

When he had finally completed his task it would require a practiced eye to notice anything queer about the floor of the cabin.

Then he, too, prepared to depart. Jack saw him stoop down and take hold of the lantern, which had all this while been resting on the ground. In his other hand he carried the long-handled shovel with which the digging had been done.

The tall man straightened up suddenly, and his manner was that of one who had been startled. Jack knew why he should act in this way, for the same sound that had come to the man's ears had also reached his.

It was a shrill whistle, twice repeated, and it came from the same direction in which the two men had gone a short time before.

Undoubtedly it was a signal denoting urgent need of haste. The actions of the tall smuggler would indicate as much; for he dashed out of the cabin like a shot, and Jack heard the thud as he threw the shovel into the shrubbery surrounding the lone hut.

Then followed the crashing of bushes as the man started by a circuitous route toward the upper end of the island. He must know every foot of the ground, and by taking to the open beach, could gain a given point much sooner than one who kept to the thick undergrowth.

Jack saw the lantern had been hastily dropped, though it was still burning. He was trembling with excitement, and feeling very much as though he wanted to yell at the top of his voice as he picked up this abandoned tool of the discovered smugglers.

He could hear the boys talking down there where the trio of motor boats were anchored; and could imagine how they must be wondering what all the racket on the island meant; while Josh would doubtless start in to tell them how he, Jack, had persisted in going ashore.

Some one was coming, for Jack could hear quick footsteps near by. He still held his Marlin gun, but was loath to even threaten to use it. Nor was there any need, for a moment later the moving dim figure took form, and proved to be no other than Professor Marshland.

At sight of Jack standing there, lantern in one hand and gun in the other, the gentleman allowed something like a grim smile to creep over his face, even as he came hurrying up, almost out of breath from his exertions.

"Do you know what it all means, Jack?" demanded the other, as soon as he reached the side of the boy.

Jack nodded his head eagerly.

"I was looking in through a crack, and saw what that man did. But I'm sorry he got away from you, sir," he replied.

"I managed to capture the two fellows who left the hut!" the government agent exclaimed. "My Indian has meanwhile overcome the chap who was sent to watch your boats. But unless I can overtake the ring leader of the bunch, I shall feel that my work has not been wholly a success."

"He headed for the upper end of the island," Jack put in.

"Yes, and I have reason to suspect that the other two men are there with the boat. You will be surprised when I tell you that they actually turned pirates and captured the speed launch which you told me belonged to an acquaintance of yours."

"The *Flash*," echoed Jack. "No, I am not surprised, for I had begun to suspect something like that. They must have made Clarence threaten to run us down, hoping we would pull up anchor, and get away. But if that is so, you could never hope to overtake them in that slow little boat of yours."

"Well, I should say not!" declared the other.

"Now, if it were the *Wireless*, for instance, you might have some chance," Jack went on.

"Which is just the point I wanted to put up to you boys," cried the government agent, eagerly. "Would you be willing to assist me run that clever scoundrel down? Do you think George would care to try conclusions with the *Flash*?"

At that Jack laughed.

"Why, sir," he declared, "he's been just wild for the chance, ever since we first set eyes on that narrow boat. He believes he can beat her out in a race. Suppose you come down with me right now, and we'll ask him."

"Thank you, Jack; it was a lucky day for me when I ran across you boys. But let us lose no time; for doubtless they'll be off as soon as they can, knowing that the game is now up, and all that remains to them is escape."

Nothing loth, Jack accompanied him as he started along the broad trail leading down to the cove. He could readily understand now that the revenue man must have investigated to some purpose that day while at the cabin; and knowing there were no smuggled goods in the cache then, had laid his plans to come back

in the night, in the expectation of catching the rascals in the act; which was just what he had done.

CHAPTER XIX—A RACE IN THE MOONLIGHT

"Hold on!" said the agent abruptly.

A dark figure had risen up before them; and as the moonlight fell upon the man Jack saw that it was in truth the Indian guide who had been with the "professor" in the noisy motor boat.

"Did you get him, Josh?" demanded the employer, eagerly.

"He lies under hemlock, tied hand and foot. No danger he get away," came the confident reply.

"All right," said the other. "Come along with me, John. These boys will guard the cabin and not let any one steal the hidden goods. We have other work cut out for us. We want to get our hands on that head man, Glenwood. So long as he is at large there can be no peace on the border."

Great was the astonishment of the five boys when Jack and his companions made their appearance on the shore, and the former called to have the small boats pushed in, so that they might come aboard.

"Jack, what's all this mean?" asked George, greatly excited.

"Can't tell you everything just now, fellows," the other replied. "This gentleman is a government revenue agent, and he's on the track of a band of smugglers who have been using this island as a place to land goods brought over from Canada. He captured three, but the leader got away. George, he wants to borrow your boat."

"What?" gasped the other, astounded beyond measure.

"He and his man and myself will go with you, Josh changing over," Jack continued. "While we're gone the rest of you keep on the watch and don't let anybody come aboard, no matter who he is. These scoundrels have captured the *Flash*."

"Now, what d'ye know about that?" exclaimed Nick, as he helped Josh over the side of the big *Comfort*, so as to make room for the others who were to go in the speed boat.

"But George, you haven't said yet whether you are willing to chase the *Flash*, and try to overtake her?" said the energetic agent.

"Sure I am," came the ready response; "and I believe we can get her, if nothing happens to my motor. I've had some hard luck with it when I tried to push the thing to the limit. But tumble in here, and we'll be off."

George was trembling with delightful anticipations. If anything in all the world appealed to him it was a race. None of the others had the same feeling, and, like Jack, they preferred comfort in a boat beyond speed, though none were averse to making good time.

Everybody wanted to help, and as many hands make light work, the *Wireless* was in condition to start almost as soon as the two men climbed aboard.

"Sit as near the middle as you can, please, to balance her," the others heard the skipper say, as she shot away.

"Yes," called out Nick, derisively, "and be sure your hair is parted in the middle, or it's all up with you. I know, because I was there for some four weeks."

"Which way, sir?" asked George, wisely paying no attention to this shout, which, after all, was Nick's only method for getting even, after all the agony he had endured in that cranky narrow motor boat.

"Turn to port, and head for the upper part of the island. We haven't wasted much time, and I hope to discover that boat somewhere," replied the agent.

"If we do," said George, with firmness, "make up your mind the good old *Wireless* is going to hang on like a bulldog till she cuts down the lead, and overhauls that *Flash*. Always said she had the look of a pirate, and others thought the same thing, it seems, since those men picked her out as the boat they could use."

"Just think of Clarence and Joe being in their hands all this time," remarked Jack, as they tore through the water. "Must seem like a pretty tough vacation for those boys, all right."

"Oh! I don't suppose Glenwood has really harmed them," said the agent; "but he's a hard man to deal with; and unless they knuckled down to him perhaps they've felt his fist before now. I'm hoping that, perhaps, when Clarence sees who is after him he may find some way to slow down and let us overhaul him."

George only laughed at this and remarked:

"That's because you don't know Clarence, sir. He hates me like poison, and sooner than have me beat him with my boat I believe he'd take the chances of staying in the power of those smugglers for a month. Oh! no, when he sees who

is after him he'll put things at top-notch speed, and try every trick he knows how to win out. But I'm not afraid, if only things go right with my engine."

"Look yonder!" cried the eagle-eyed agent just then, the Indian having pulled his coat sleeve and pointed ahead.

"Say, that's her, as sure as fate!" cried George, as he altered the course of his own boat a little.

"And they know we're after them, too," remarked Jack.

"Then the race is on; and good luck attend the better boat," said the government agent, coolly taking out a cigar, biting off the end, and proceeding to apply a lighted match to the same.

They were fairly flying through the water. On either side the waves parted, and rolled over smothered in foam; while in their wake a roller kept following close on their heels.

"Twenty miles if anything?" the gentleman guessed.

"More than that, sir," replied the skipper, proudly; "but she can do better still. I've got another notch to let out if I have to. Don't want to take the chances unless it's positively necessary; because you see the quivering rattles her so much. Are we holding our own, do you think, Jack?"

"I am sure of that," came the reply. "And if you asked me again I'd say we are gaining a little all the while."

"Bully old *Wireless!*" exclaimed George, his voice filled with pride. "She can do the stunt all right if only something don't happen to throw us out of our gear. She's a wonder, that's what, and I've always said so. Talk about sprinting, did you ever go as fast as this in a small boat, sir?"

"I certainly never have," replied the government agent; and from the way he was staggering around, clutching hold of every object that promised to keep him erect, it looked as though he might just as well have added: "and Heaven deliver me from ever experiencing it again."

"Everybody keep a sharp lookout for rocks or anything of the sort," said George; "because those men must know this region like a book, and it would be just like 'em to lead us in a trap, so we'd be wrecked."

"Yes, you're correct there, George," observed the agent, "and I give you credit for having a long head. That's the kind of chaps you're up against right now, full of trickery; desperate men, whose one idea is escape."

"This moonlight is all right as long as the other boat isn't any further away than she is," remarked George a minute or two later.

"I'm sorry to state that you can't count on the candle up in the sky much longer," remarked the gentleman; "for there is a suspicious bank of black clouds

hovering near, and at any time she's apt to be eclipsed."

"All right," and George laughed a bit hysterically, since he was laboring under so great a strain of excitement. "Jack, would you mind attending to my searchlight. Then we'll be ready for the trouble when she comes."

And a couple of minutes later, when the dark mask did cover the face of the moon, a long vivid white gleam reached out from the brass searchlight on the forward deck of the quivering speed boat. It widened as it extended in the distance; and plainly seen was the flitting craft they pursued. The position of the *Flash* could be detected better by means of the white foam-tipped waves thrown aside by her swift passage, rather than by viewing the boat itself.

"That's splendid!" remarked the government agent, as he looked along this lane of illumination, and watched the desperate struggles of the *Flash* to outrun her determined pursuers.

"Still picking up on her, ain't we, Jack?" asked George, after a little.

"No doubt about that, I think," came the reply. "And I guess you were right when you declared the good old *Wireless* was the better boat. She can certainly walk over the water some. I would enjoy this more if it was day-time."

"I guess we all would," laughed the gentleman, still gripping hold of the brass rail to make sure he might not be plunged overboard should anything suddenly go wrong.

"If only the engine behaves half-way decent," sighed George. "She's doing nobly right now, though, ain't she, Jack? But I hope they don't toll us in among the rocks. If we ever come slap up against one at this rate there's going to be some high vaulting, I tell you. Whew! did you see that one sticking out of the water? I just swerved in time, though. Keep watching, everybody, and tell me quick if you see anything ugly ahead!"

Their pace was not abated a particle, even though George knew that new perils were strewn in their course. If that other boat ahead could speed through this same tortuous channel he believed he dared take the same chances. And George had always been reckoned a daring boy by his schoolmates, in football games or on the diamond; so that this venturesome spirit was no new freak on his part.

It was only by the greatest effort that he refrained from throwing on the last atom of speed, and hastening the overtaking of the fugitive motor boat.

They were rushing on at this tremendous pace, and constantly gaining, when George gave vent to a sudden loud exclamation.

CHAPTER XX—OVERHAULED

Jack had seen the same object that had given George such a start. Across the white path of illumination thrown forward by the powerful little acetylene searchlight, a shadowy, moving thing suddenly appeared.

It was a sailboat, beating up against a head wind, and aiming to reach its home port while the possibility of moonlight lasted.

Whatever tempted the man at the tiller to try and cross between the swift moving motor boats no one might ever know. But it was the nearest to a collision, without an actual calamity, Jack had ever experienced.

He instinctively understood that the only thing that would prevent the *Wireless* from plunging into the luckless sailboat would be a prompt reversal on the part of the skipper at the wheel. And such an action was apt to endanger the working abilities of the *Wireless'* engine, never too trustworthy under a strain.

Had George failed, Jack stood ready to butt in and execute the speed maneuver; for this was a case that would admit of no ceremony. Life and death might be in the balance.

But, fortunately, George kept his head. He instantly did what was necessary, and the tremendous forward movement of the rushing speed boat was instantly checked.

Indeed, so astonishing was the change that the government agent came near plunging headlong over the rail into the river. Jack stretched out a hand and caught him just in time. As for the Indian, he sprawled on all fours in the bottom of the craft, trying to keep his head from bumping against some obstacle.

But Jack was delighted to see that the engine had actually redeemed itself; for it still continued to work at the old stand.

The adventurous sailboat glided out of the way, so close that the sharp bow of the *Wireless* almost touched the boom that was hauled well in during the tacking process. A couple of white, scared faces could be seen for two seconds; and then

the sailboat was engulfed in the shadows that lay on either side, out beyond range of that searchlight radius.

"Bully for her!" gulped George, almost unable to articulate under the tremendous strain, yet thinking only of the able work of his engine.

"Speed her up again, George; but not with a rush!" called Jack.

Looking ahead he saw that, just as he expected, the *Flash* had managed to take advantage of the momentary detention of her rival, and increased the distance separating them.

"That was tough luck!" said the government agent; "but I owe you thanks for saving me from a wet jacket, my boy."

"I guess we're fortunate not to have smashed into that silly crowd, and played hob with everything," Jack remarked.

"But look where they are," groaned the anxious George. "Just about as far ahead as in the start; and it's all got to be done over again. Oh; what fools some men are when they get in a boat. All they had to do was to come up in the wind till the procession passed. Instead, they tried to butt in, and came near spoiling the whole game. What shall we do, Jack?"

"Do you want me to say what I'd do if this was my boat?" asked the other.

"Sure I do," George spoke up. "They've got some clever trick ahead, and may lose us yet. You notice that they hardly make any noise, even while the muffler isn't working. That boat was just made for a smuggler, or a pirate. But go on, Jack, tell me."

"All right," said the other. "You see how well your engine is going. She's had all the freak rubbed off her, I guess, and is now buckling right down to business. And honestly, George, I believe you can trust her with that reserve notch of speed! I'd try it, if I were you."

"Now, I'm glad to hear you say that, Jack," exclaimed the skipper, eagerly. "For during that other trip my engine played so many pranks that she got a black eye among my chums. If so be she's settled down to a steady stage, the sooner I know it the better. I'll be delighted to find it out. So here goes. Steady, all; hold on tight!"

The government agent, not knowing what to expect, for they were as near flying now as he ever expected to get, thought the policy of his crafty Indian helper worth imitating. So he simply dropped down in the body of the boat and braced himself against a shock.

But there was none. When George applied that last little reserve bit of power a slight jump forward resulted; and then after that the only difference seemed to be that they drew up on the fugitive *Flash* hand over hand.

George was nearly wild with delight. To him the fact that his cranky engine had finally determined to be good and do the duty which her makers had meant she should, far outweighed all else. So far as he was concerned it did not matter much whether the three men in the *Flash* were captured or not; but it was an affair of exceeding importance that the good, reliable old *Wireless* should overhaul its rival in this masterly manner.

"See her hump herself, Jack!" he ejaculated, as he balanced himself in the swaying craft, and peered eagerly ahead toward the other boat. "Ain't she coming up nobly, though? Talk to me about the *Flash* making circles around us; why, she ain't in the same class with this same old *Wireless.* Oh! but this pays me for all the troubles I've had in the past. I can hardly keep from yelling, Jack!"

"Better quit that monkey business, then," cautioned the other. "You need all your wind and eyesight and everything else right now in handling such a greyhound."

That just about finished George.

"Thank you, Jack, for giving her that fine name. But she deserves it," he said. "I understand what you mean; and, believe me, I'll try to hold my spirits in check until the game is won. I'd hate to have any accident happen now, I tell you."

And he did buckle down to business with new determination and grit, grasping the vibrating wheel with all his strength, and watching to see just what the tricky skipper of that other craft might do. For George knew Clarence only too well, nor would he put anything past the other when it came down to cunning.

They were now so close that it was easy to see everything taking place on board the fleeing *Flash.* Clarence was at the wheel, and several figures crouched along either side, evidently holding on for dear life. One was in the stern, and Jack had little difficulty in making him out as the tall man he had first seen in the old cabin, and whom the agent had called Glenwood.

"Looks like we would run alongside in less than five minutes, sir," observed George, trying to steady his voice, but hardly succeeding, for his nerves were tingling in a manner he had seldom if ever experienced before.

"Keep just a little to the left, then," answered the agent. "And watch out, for it is barely possible they may try to foul us at the last, hoping to escape in the confusion."

Jack was changing his mind now about that same thing. He had an idea that perhaps Clarence had played a trick on the men who held him in custody; he may not have let out all the speed of which the *Flash* was capable. Besides, now that the race seemed virtually over, and the *Wireless* had proven the superior why should he want to bring about a collision that would wreck both boats, as well as

endanger the lives of all the occupants?

"Steady, George, steady!" Jack cautioned, as he thought he saw a slight change in the course taken by the boat ahead.

"Duck down, boys; he's going to try and scare us by firing!" suddenly said the keen-eyed government agent.

Even George managed to partly drop, so as to be shielded by the forward deck. And that the revenue man had guessed correctly was made evident when there broke out the sharp report of a revolver. Jack even believed he could hear the peculiar whine of the flying bullet as it passed over the boat.

"Stay where you are!" cried the agent; "that was only one. He's got a few more of the same kind to follow!"

There came other shots in rapid succession. Really, it would not be surprising if George lost his head under such circumstances, for usually it takes a veteran to preserve his coolness under fire. But, singular to state, the nervous one of the motor boys now proved that he could shut his teeth together and hold on tenaciously with bulldog courage.

The *Wireless* may have wavered just a little, but still kept swiftly on, diminishing the narrow lead of her rival with constant rapidity and steadiness.

"That's all!" called the revenue man, as the sixth shot sounded; and every one felt a perceptible thud, telling that this time the desperate smuggler had lowered his aim, and that the bullet had struck the boat somewhere. "And as it's a poor rule that won't work both ways, perhaps I can have a little better luck in scaring some one. Watch out, George, and be ready to stop short if he does!"

With that he threw out his arm, and instantly there was a flash and a report.

"Oh!" exclaimed George, startled in spite of the warning.

Jack's heart was fluttering with excitement. He also felt something like regret that Clarence was there in line with the fire. Though the agent might be only seeking to frighten the boy at the wheel of the *Flash*, still something serious was apt to happen. Jack wished in his soul that it was all over and nobody injured.

The *Flash* began to wabble badly, showing that Clarence was trying to shield himself from the battery in the rear, something which he would find it hard to do.

Jack stood ready to lend a hand in case of an emergency that George might seem unable to manage alone.

And it was right at that critical moment, just when light was needed most of all, that the fickle moon shot out from behind the bank of clouds, illuminating the surface of the broad St. Lawrence, dotted still with islands, upon which in many cases cottages could be seen.

Jack thought that was a good omen; but there was no time to spend in reflec-

tion. Another sharp report close to his ear told that the revenue man believed in following up a good thing. He knew that Clarence was on the point of surrender, and intended to strike while the iron was hot.

"Look out, George!"

Jack shouted this warning in the ear of his chum, for the leading motor boat had suddenly slackened her speed, the quick pulsation of her engine having ceased to beat upon the air.

Instantly the motor of the *Wireless* followed suit; and driven forward by the impetus of her "push," she shot alongside the other craft, not three feet away.

Jack breathed easier, for he saw now that a collision was not to follow. The nerve of Clarence had possibly failed him at the climax; and his last move had been to stop his engine, before dropping flat in the bottom of his boat.

"Over into her, John! We must make prisoners here!" shouted the agent, as he balanced on the rail of the *Wireless*, and in so doing almost brought that side of the narrow-beam boat awash.

"There he goes, sir!" called Jack.

A big splash followed, as a figure sprang from the opposite side of the other boat. Evidently the desperate smuggler, as a last resort, had taken to the water, in the hope that he might yet baffle his pursuers, and escape to the Canada shore.

Jack had snatched up a boathook with a brass knobbed end. This he fastened to the rail of the *Flash*, and exerting all his strength, began to draw the two boats closer together, so that the revenue agent and his assistant might make the transfer safely.

He saw them leap across, and felt the boat rock violently under the strain; but not for an instant did he let go his hold. There was something of a rumpus going on aboard the *Flash*, as though the government men might be struggling with the two smugglers whom they found there, lacking in nerve to follow after their leader, or else not knowing how to swim. But in another minute these sounds ceased, from which he guessed that the pair had been subdued.

CHAPTER XXI—A CLEAN SWEEP

"Jack!"

It was the revenue man calling, and he appeared at the side of the other boat.

"Yes, what is it, sir?" replied the lad who held the boathook.

"I'm coming over again," continued the other. "I hate to let that clever rascal get away; and we must try to pick him up. Hold steady now."

The transfer was made without any accident, though both boats careened wildly under the strain, thanks to their sharp keels, fashioned only with an eye to making speed.

"I see him, sir!" cried George, as he once more started his engine, and began to curve around the now stationary *Flash*.

Jack could also readily pick up the swimmer. Evidently Glenwood must have kicked off his shoes, and divested himself of coat and vest, before jumping overboard; for he was making splendid progress through the water, using a hand-over-hand stroke.

This necessitated more or less churning of the water, however, and since the moon persisted in playing into the hands of his enemies by staying out steadily, his course was readily seen.

They bore down rapidly upon him, once the boat had been turned around. But Jack knew only too well that a strong and desperate swimmer would be apt to give his pursuers a hard pull before they could get him. If Glenwood knew his business, as seemed evident, he would hold himself in readiness to duck under, just when they thought to reach over and grasp him.

"Now, steady while I nab him!" said the revenue man, leaning over the bow.

"He's gone under, sir!" cried Jack, who was holding on to that serviceable

boathook, with the idea that possibly he might find a chance to get it fast in the garments of the man in the water.

"Yes, I expected that," replied the other. "And of course we don't know just where he'll come up again. Our only chance is to keep him going until even his iron muscles weaken. We hold the advantage, boys. Look on that side, Jack, and I'll take care of this. George, be ready to work around or back up, as the case may be."

Ten seconds later and Jack called out:

"Here he is, on this side, George!"

Then began one of the queerest experiences Jack had ever participated in. All of his hare and hound and paper chases must sink into insignificance after this hunt; for a desperate man was seeking to effect his escape.

Glenwood would wait until they were close upon him, meanwhile trying to recuperate. Then, at the critical instant, he would sink out of sight, and swim under water to the other side of the boat, or the rear, never ahead. In this way he kept them guessing; and besides, after the boat was started it was necessary for them to make more or less of a circuit before they could bear down on the fugitive again.

"What does he hope to gain by all this, sir?" asked George, when they had missed the swimmer for the fourth time, and were waiting for him to appear again.

"Oh! Glenwood is a keen one," replied the government agent. "Depend on it he has several irons in the fire. Perhaps he expects to get a chance to land on the Canadian shore, where I could not very well chase him. Then again he keeps hoping that our good friend, the moon, will kindly hide again. That would give him all the opportunity he wants to come up, get a breath, and vanish without being seen. There he is, George; back up this time!"

So the merry chase continued—at least it may have seemed that to the two boys, but must have assumed a more serious aspect with the man they were after. Jack could not but admire the nerve and audacity of the swimmer. He even secretly began to hope Glenwood might get away; for after all it was none of their business, though the fellow was really a criminal, in that he was breaking the laws of the land.

But George had entered heart and soul into the game, and was determined to do all he could to assist the revenue man. He backed the boat so fast that soon the swimmer had to duck again.

"He's getting weaker all the time, boys," remarked the agent, in a satisfied tone. "We have only to keep this system of tactics up a little longer, and Glenwood will be only too glad to come in out of the wet, or drown."

"Oh! I hope that doesn't happen," said George.

"Little fear," replied the other. "Like most of us, Glenwood clings on to life, and always has hopes of escaping. Do you see him yet, either of you?"

"Not on this side," replied Jack.

"And I don't glimpse him here," George went on.

"But he's been under almost a full minute now, and that's a long time for one as exhausted as he must be," the agent remarked, seriously.

"Oh! I hope he hasn't acted like I've known wounded ducks to do," said George, "go to the bottom, and hold on to the eel grass until they drown. That would be terrible."

"And if he'd only held out a few minutes more he might have had the chance he was looking for, sir," said Jack; "for there's another bunch of clouds making up toward the moon."

"Just so, Jack," remarked the revenue man, glancing aloft; "and I wager Glenwood knew that fact, too."

"But where can he be, sir? It would be impossible for any one to stay under so long. I'm something of a swimmer myself, and I know I couldn't," George went on, anxiously.

"Sure he didn't bob up quietly, take a breath or two, and sink out of sight again?" asked the other.

Both boys declared they were positive that such had not been the case. The revenue man remained there for another minute, as though pondering. Then Jack saw him look up and smile. He did not call out, but made a mysterious motion with his hand that seemed to call for silence.

Then Jack saw him creeping slowly and cautiously toward the stern of the boat. George stared with wide open eyes, as though the startling thought had come to him that their passenger had suddenly gone crazy. But if so, there was a method in his madness, and Jack had guessed it.

The stern of the *Wireless* was not an over-hang, but the customary square one of a speed boat. Still, any one in the water could hang on to the rudder, keeping clear of the propeller; and while the boat was stationary, be concealed from the view of those aboard, unless indeed, some inquisitive person thrust his head far out over the edge.

Undoubtedly the cunning Glenwood had conceived this to be a good plan, to rest, and wait for the cloud to cover the face of the moon, when he could dip again, and pass away under the water beyond reach of their limited vision.

Jack almost ceased to breathe, so intensely interested was he in watching the advance of the revenue man. It was a case of diamond cut diamond, apparently,

and victory would go to the keener mind.

Now the agent was crawling over the stern, and evidently getting in readiness to suddenly swoop his arm down, with fingers extended, to clutch anything he might come in contact with there.

He made the movement with a celerity that reminded Jack of the swoop of a hawk on a pigeon. And apparently he must have gauged his action nicely; for immediately there arose a yell, and a threshing of the water followed; while the agent held on desperately, calling to the others for assistance.

Two hands were seen to clutch the brass rail; and then a head came into view.

"No need to yank my hair out; I'm coming aboard all right, Carson!" gasped the exhausted swimmer; but the government agent evidently looked upon him as a slippery customer, for he declined to release his clutch until the man had been pulled wholly into the boat, and stretched on his back in the bottom.

Jack felt a queer chill when he heard something "click," and realized that for the first time in all his life he saw a prisoner hand-cuffed. But Glenwood did not appear to be very much cast down. He had faced this situation a long time, and evidently discounted all its terrors. He even laughed as soon as he got his breath.

"It was some fun while it lasted, Carson," he said.

"And you came near playing it on me for good," replied the other, laughing in his turn. "I only fell to your smart trick by accident. Seemed to me I felt something bump against the side of the boat, when none of us chanced to be moving. And then I figured what I would do myself in a similar case. That was how I came to hit on your game, Glenwood."

"How about my friends; did they get away?" asked the other.

"George," the agent went on, "turn around, and we'll head back; if you're in doubt I can tell you just where we'll find the other boat, first of all, and then the island where your comrades are waiting."

Then he turned to his prisoner, saying:

"Neither of them took the dare you set, Glenwood; and we got the upper hand of both in short order. Besides, there are three chaps with their legs tied up, on the island."

"A clean sweep, you've made of it, then," remarked the smuggler, disconsolately; "bagged the whole lot, and the stuff in the bargain. Well, I knew how it would be when I heard they were sending you up here, Carson. Sooner or later I guessed we'd be up against it, and meet with our finish. But it came quicker than I expected."

He said nothing more, nor did the government agent seem disposed to enter

into further conversation just then. Keeping at the elbow of the pilot, he watched him head the boat along toward where George thought the *Flash* would be found. And that his judgment was good they presently saw, when in the moonlight the other motor boat was discovered quite motionless on the river.

George gave a signal, which was immediately answered. When they drew alongside it was to find that both Clarence and Bully Joe were awaiting their coming with more or less eagerness.

"Thank goodness!" said the owner of the *Flash*; "now we'll get rid of these ugly fellows. They just pounced down on us several days ago, and we've had to do what they wanted ever since. I hope, sir, you won't bother taking us along with you, because we've had nothing to do with their games. We were prisoners, that's right. I was threatened with all sorts of terrible things if I refused to run the boat as that man wanted."

"Oh! I understand that, young fellow," said Mr. Carson, pleasantly. "All I want you to do is to accompany us back to the island, carrying those you have aboard. I'll relieve you of them there, and you can go about your business. I have no call out for you. But next time I advise you to be a little more careful whose company you accept. It got you into trouble once, and may again."

"I declare I have no idea where our blooming old haunted island lies," admitted George, frankly; "and I'll have to ask you to stand by sir, to tell me how to steer."

"That's easily done, George;" laughed the other. "And you've been a big help to me, something I'll not soon forget either. Clarence, keep as close by us as is safe; and we'll have no more racing as we return, remember."

Clarence had something on his mind, nor could he keep from saying what it was.

"Think you climbed up on me hand over fist, don't you, George," he remarked, as the two speed boats got under way once more. "Well, you've got another think coming, that's what. He ordered me to hit up my hottest pace, and I told him I was doing it; but all the same I kept a bit in reserve. The *Flash* can do better; and some fine day you'll all get your eyes opened, perhaps. I played my little game to get rid of unwelcome passengers, leaving the question about which was the faster boat to be settled some other time. See?"

"That's a likely story," sneered George, who would not think of letting any one dim the glory that the dashing *Wireless* had so gallantly won; and least of all Clarence Macklin. "Tell that to the marines, will you? But if the chance ever comes I'll try it all over with you for fair. Meanwhile don't bother yourself boasting how you're going to cut figure eight's around me, with that pirate boat of yours. She

looks dangerous; but in a race something besides looks counts. I've got it right here. That'll be enough for you, Clarence," and George declined to exchange any further words with the skipper of the defeated motor boat.

CHAPTER XXII—BUSTER'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH

It proved that Mr. Carson knew his St. Lawrence in the neighborhood of the Thousand Islands by heart, so that even in the misty moonlight he was able to guide the two speed boats back to the haunted island.

Their arrival was the signal for an outburst of cheers from those of the motor boat boys who had been left behind.

Great was the excitement that took possession of the four when they discovered that it was Clarence and Bully Joe who were now in charge of the mysterious dark speed boat; and after finding out that three smugglers lay in the bottom, with their ankles tied, and steel bracelets on their wrists, Nick and Josh were so overwhelmed with amazement that they could hardly speak for a brief time. And as the others realized, when the tall lad lost his voice it must be something wonderful indeed that had happened.

Mr. Carson meant to lose no time. He sent his Indian assistant across the island to take the little canvas collapsible canoe, and cross over to a neighboring piece of land, where their noisy motor boat had been concealed earlier in the evening.

Of course the boys now understood that it had been this river craft whose loud, rattling pulsations they had caught at the time George first mentioned hearing the sounds.

When, a little later, the pilot returned, bringing the snub-nosed boat with him, the three prisoners were transferred without much trouble. After that the revenue man and his helper went ashore to complete the job. One by one they brought off the trio of prisoners who had been left there helpless.

Finally they carried aboard the large packs that Jack had seen hidden in the cavity under the old straw in the cabin's earthen floor.

"I think that finishes the job," remarked the energetic agent, as he wiped his wet forehead. "And I must admit that, taken as a whole, it's about the most satisfactory piece of business I've handled for a long time."

"Did you get them all, sir?" Josh asked, filled with admiration for the man who could engineer a big scheme like this and bring it to a successful close.

"The entire working force is now in custody, I believe," replied Mr. Carson. "To be sure there are probably some persons connected with the band whom we will never lay hands on; such as those who supplied the funds, and shipped the goods across the border. But it may be possible to catch some of the guilty receivers over on our side of the river. When rogues find themselves fast in the toils, they frequently offer to confess all they know in order to curry favor with the authorities. And secretly, between us, I imagine Glenwood may yet be induced to turn state's evidence."

"Are you going to leave us now, sir?" asked Jack, seeing that the other was evidently preparing to cross over to his own well laden motor boat.

"Yes," came the reply. "The sooner I get this cargo behind the bars, the better. But I want to shake hands with each one of you, and thank you again most heartily for the assistance you have given me in this matter. I don't mean to let it drop there; and you may expect to hear from me again, since Jack Stormways has given me his address. Good night boys, and may the balance of your vacation be as peaceful as the beginning has been stormy."

"Oh! well, we've sure enjoyed it, Mr. Carson," said George, "and it was worth a heap to me to have that chance to try conclusions with the *Flash*."

"I've no doubt of it, George," laughed the agent, as he clambered over the side of his stubby little launch. "And since I miss that same evil looking boat, I surmise that our friend Clarence did not care to stay here in your company any longer than he could help."

"He scooted off as soon as you had gone ashore for the prisoners, sir," observed Nick, who wanted to have a last word with the man he admired so much.

And in another minute the Indian pilot had set his chatterbox of an engine to beating a lively tattoo, upon which the stub-nosed launch began to draw away. As long as it remained in sight in the moonlight the boys cheered, and called goodbyes, so that if there chanced to be any more ghosts lingering about that haunted island they must have taken this for a clear defiance of their power, and concluded to remain in hiding during the balance of the stay of the motor boat boys.

"Think we can pick up a few winks of sleep, fellows?" asked George, when the clatter of the loud-voiced engine had been mellowed by distance.

"We ought to try, anyhow," said Jack, "Seems to me we've had our rest pretty badly broken up lately. For one I'm going to forget it all for a while."

But the chances were that none of them got any satisfactory sleep during the balance of that eventful night.

On the following morning they prepared to vacate the cove that had been their anchorage for so long. All of them first went ashore; for Nick and Herb were very anxious to see the cabin, and the hole in the floor were the smugglers kept their goods concealed after secretly bringing the stuff over from the Canada mainland, waiting until a good chance opened to scatter it through the state, free of duty.

"Well," declared Nick, as they prepared to get underway later in the morning; "this has been a great experience all around, sure enough. And it ended fine—that is for us boys, though I guess poor old Glenwood and his fellow conspirators don't feel so very gay over it."

"And don't forget our friends, Clarence and Bully Joe, while about it," spoke up George. "Just stop and think what Macklin went through—held a prisoner by those reckless men, and threatened with all sorts of trouble if he so much as squeaked on 'em. Then forced to do whatever they wanted. And last, but far from least, beaten in a fair race by this dandy little meteor boat that he once sneered at. That's glory enough for me, I'm telling you, shipmates."

"I guess we all enjoyed it," remarked Josh.

"Yes, so far as I'm concerned I'd be quite contented and happy right now, if I only knew one thing," remarked Nick, looking doleful again.

"Here, don't you go to starting up your tune about that break," said George, "we all agreed long ago that if you *did* leak to Clarence, you never would have done it on purpose. So forget it."

"But I tell you I can't," flashed back the fat boy. "I feel sore about it; and I want to find out the truth so that every one of you'll get down on your marrowbones and ask my pardon. And something tells me the time ain't so far away when that very thing is going to happen."

"Then speed the hour," grinned Herb; "after you've seen us in a row asking forgiveness, perhaps we'll have peace, and you'll forget the incident."

"Don't count too heavily on that," George said. "You don't know Buster as well as I do. Just as like as not he'll turn out to be made up the same way as that thirsty young woman in the sleeping car, you know."

"But perhaps we don't know, so suppose you tell us," Nick himself burst out with curiosity consuming him.

"Oh! I thought it was a chestnut; but if you will have it, listen. A traveling

man, trying to go to sleep, heard some woman keep on saying out loud in the berth next to him 'Oh! I am so thirsty! Oh! I am so thirsty!' When he couldn't stand for it any longer he got up, went and fetched a glass of water, and begged her to accept it. Then he went back to his berth, thinking he would have peace. But soon he heard the same woman saying over and over again: 'Oh! I was so thirsty! I was so thirsty!' So look out Buster don't play that game on you, Herb."

There was a shout at this, in which Nick joined; for being a good-natured chap in the main, he could take a joke that was leveled at himself.

About nine o'clock the signal was given, and the three motor boats forming the cruising fleet pulled out of the friendly cove. Those on board looked back with more or less rejoicing and regret at the scene of their recent adventures. They would not soon forget all that had happened since first they dropped in there for a night's stay. And Jack's entries in the official log would doubtless prove very entertaining reading for the folks at home.

Upon examining the bow of his speed boat George had found where that bullet had struck, that was fired last of all by the desperate smuggler, in hopes of frightening the boy at the wheel of the pursuing craft.

It had made quite a hole, though fortunately doing no real damage. Later on he could of course, have the aperture plugged; but for the present it would stand as a mute witness to the truth of the adventurous story the boys had to tell. If any one of their mates at home ventured to scoff at the idea of their having been actually under a hot fire, he stood ready to pry that bit of lead out of its lodgings, and thus confound the skeptic.

They were now on the second week of their vacation, and of course had lots of territory to cover still, before they could say they had exhausted the pleasures of this wonderful cruising ground. But already the motor boat boys were looking forward to another daring venture, and all of them had written home to gain the consent of those who must be consulted ere determining positively on their plans.

This included a long trip through lakes Ontario and Erie, up past Detroit into Lake Huron, along the shore of this great body of water until the wonderful Soo was reached at the head of the St. Mary's river; and then possibly into Superior; winding up with a run down Lake Michigan to Milwaukee, where the boats could be sent home the same way they had left, via railroad.

Of course, being real boys, once a great undertaking like this had formed itself in their minds they could talk of little else. And Jack knew very well that if any determined opposition developed at home, that would put a damper on the grand scheme, there would be a feeling of gloom settle down over the whole expedition.

After leaving the haunted island the first object of the boys was to get back to Clayton, and not only replenish their depleted supplies, but gather up any mail that would, according to orders, be held for them at the post office there.

Josh went ashore to get the mail, while Jack looked after the supplies. Nick seemed unusually uneasy all the time they were gone; and upon their showing up he demanded shrilly that the letters be distributed without delay.

"Only one for you, Pudding," jeered the letter carrier, as he held it up; "and seems to me I smell violet perfume on that. Must be a dainty billet doux from Rosie Sinclair; but here, take it and go off by yourself. It would make us all die of envy to see you reading such sweet stuff, when we are forgotten by our best girls."

Nick eagerly snatched the missive from his hand, and with trembling fingers tore it open. A minute later the others were astonished to hear him give a loud whoop.

"What did I tell you, fellows?" he exclaimed, trying to dance around like a wild Indian, and waving the open letter. "Mebbe I ain't something of a detective myself? Come around here, every one of you now, and get ready to do that marrow-bone act you promised."

"What's all this mean? Has he gone out of his mind?" asked George.

"Tell us, Buster," said Jack, who could suspect something of the nature of the communication Nick had received.

"His dad has said he can take the northern cruise, that's what!" remarked Josh, a bit enviously.

"Oh! you're away off there," cried the fat boy, derisively. "Why, you couldn't guess the truth in a month of Sundays, Josh. It takes real brains to figure out a solution to a mystery like that. And I did it, all by my little self."

"Great governor!" ejaculated George, "listen to him, would you, fellows? Honest now, if it don't sound as if he'd found out where that leak lay. Here, Buster, it isn't fair to keep us on the ragged edge so long. Open up now, and explain. Did anybody talk in their sleep? Who told Clarence our plans?"

"You did, George; yes, and so did Jack and Herb and Josh—I guess Jimmie and myself had a hand in it too!" laughed the fat boy, to their great mystification!

CHAPTER XXIII—HAPPY DAYS—CONCLUSION

"Poor old Buster! He's sure getting weak in the upper story," said George.

"It's going to be a strait-jacket for him before long!" sighed Josh.

But Jack spoke not a word; for he could somehow see further than the rest of the boys, and understood that Nick held a strong hand.

"Oh! is that the way you're thinking?" said the fat boy, still trembling with the violence of his excitement. "Just wait till I read this little letter, and then if you're honest you'll do the right thing by poor old Buster."

"He's going to read Rosie's little note to us, fellows!" cried Josh, pretending to be horror-stricken at such a base betrayal of confidence.

"Who said it was from Rosie, or any girl at all?" demanded Nick, indignantly. "Look at the name signed at the bottom, and you can read Aleck. Yes, it's from my old friend, Aleck Sands. I wrote him a week ago, when that bright thought first dazzled me. And you remember, when Josh here gave me that start by talking through that old rusted tin water pipe? Well, that made me believe harder than before that I'd got on the track."

"Read the letter, plague take you, Nick!" roared impatient George; "don't you see you're giving some of us heart disease right now, with your everlasting slow way of getting at things."

So Nick, assuming a posture that, according to his mind signified the attitude of a victor awaiting the laurel wreath, began in his slow way.

"Dear Buster:

"As soon as I got your interesting letter I hit it up for the school house. Found old Crusty Bill Edwards hard at work, and had to bribe him to let me get in. Went up to the little room where we hold our

club meetings. Yes, you were right, Buster; the register from the furnace in that room does back into the cloak room. Found both of 'em shut, but got old Bill to stand in the club room while I opened the registers, and then listened in the cloak closet while he talked to himself. And Buster, why, say, I could near hear the old man *think*, every sound came through that hole so plain. If you fellows talked about your plans that day you were there, and Clarence was hiding in the cloak room, make up your mind, old chap, he heard every word you said; In a hurry so I'll ring off.

"Yours, Aleck."

As Nick read the last word he paused and looked expectant. His motor-mates stared at one another as though for the moment rendered incapable of speech. The cleverness of the fat boy's deduction was stunning; had it sprung from Jack, now, they might not have considered it so very wonderful; but to think that Buster, always so slow to grasp anything, could have done it, fairly staggered them.

Jack was the first to recover. Laughingly he dropped on one knee beside Nick, and seizing the fat hand of the victor he pretended to kiss it with due humility.

The others entered into the spirit of the occasion; and right there on the dock, regardless of the stares of passersby, the five clung around the grinning Buster, begging him to forgive their thick-headedness, and restore them to favor.

Nick of course, enjoyed the game most heartily, and laughed himself into a fit of choking, as he raised his chums, one by one, and tapped them on the head in token of his pardon.

"However did you come to think of it?" asked George, a little later, as they were once more aboard their boats, and ready to start forth in search of new adventures.

"I dreamed about it, and that's the truth," declared Nick, solemnly; nor could they ever get him to change his assertion. "Woke me right up in the middle of the night too. Thought I saw Clarence peekin' through a hole, and laughing to beat the band; and then I saw the silly crowd in the next room. That gave me an idea, and started me to thinking. I believed I remembered that register, and had an idea there was another one just back of it opening into that cloak room. Now you don't blame me for wanting to get that letter, do you?"

"I should say not," declared George frankly. "Why you've just covered yourself with glory, Buster. After this, when anything mysterious happens, we'll turn to you to guess the answer. You ought to be a lawyer, sure."

"Or a revenue man," suggested Herb.

"Guess Buster'd like to be the head steward on a big Atlantic liner best of all," was the wicked remark of the envious Josh.

But the fat boy was in a jolly frame of mind, and could not be provoked by any sort of fling just then. He turned to his tormentor, and smiling sweetly, remarked:

"Josh knows my weak point; but then you fellows understand that it's only green envy that makes him say such things. Right now he'd give almost anything if only he had my honest appetite. I never make faces at my meals. Why, I'm ready for one right at this present minute, fellows."

"Well," said Jack, "let's get off a few miles from Clayton before we think to start the stoves going. Perhaps we'll find a nice quiet place where we can go ashore, and do the cooking stunt. This place is too thickly populated to make a show of ourselves to the gaping natives."

"Now, I know you mean me when you say that, Jack," observed Nick, reproachfully. "But while I confess that I've got a bully good appetite, I hope I don't disgrace the bunch when I join in the eating game. Herb, are we ready to start? While we are moving along I'll try and hatch up a new dish out of my new book here, that will make your mouths water."

"If Herb was wise he'd have drowned that cook book long before this," muttered Josh, as George gave his engine a fling and immediately started away in the lead.

The three motor boats kept close company. George had apparently experienced all the running on ahead he wished, during that previous memorable cruise down the Mississippi; and was content after rushing half a mile in the lead to slow down and let the others catch up with him.

He was in great spirits this morning. That wonderful little race in the moonlight on the preceding night, with its successful termination, had made him fall in love with his cranky speed boat more than ever. He could hardly talk intelligently about anything else; and finally the others declared that he was even a worse sinner in that respect than Nick had ever been.

The day was sunshiny, and everything around them seemed joyous, so it was not to be thought strange that the motor boat boys were every little while bursting out in snatches of song, or exchanging joking remarks as the boats chanced to close up.

"Wonder if we'll ever hear from the gentleman again?" Herb was saying, as they later on headed for a bit of lonely shore, where it seemed inviting to campers.

"If you mean Mr. Carson," Jack replied, "I'm sure we will, for he gave his

promise; and a man like him never goes back on his word. I've an idea he means to send us some little thing to put in our clubroom, to remember the adventure by."

"As if we'd be likely to ever forget it?" laughed George, patting his throbbing motor affectionately.

"I've thought up that new mess, fellows!" called out Nick, just then.

Everybody groaned in unison.

"You know we've always had Boston baked beans and coffee for lunch whenever we got a chance to go ashore at noon. All right. I'm for progress. I like to vary our meals some. Let's turn things upside down, and right around. If you agree, then today let the bill of fare be coffee and Boston baked beans."

"Bully for Buster! He's the one bright mind in the bunch!" laughed George.

"We can have a new dish every day at that rate, fellows!" sang out Herb.

And so, joking and laughing in this way, they ran close in, found a deep place to anchor the three motor boats, and began to get ashore with such things as they needed for the meal.

The future looked very bright to those six jolly fellows just then, with never a cloud in sight. Presently they hoped to be hearing the returns from home, when they would know whether their plan for an extended cruise was looked upon favorably by the powers that controlled their destinies.

But no matter what the outcome of that proposition might be, they did not mean to worry over anything. The great St. Lawrence was an ideal cruising place, and doubtless if they were forced to stay there during the balance of the summer they could find plenty of amusement in the way of fishing, racing, and exploring.

Only Josh solemnly expressed the hope that in their "nosing around," as he called it, they might not happen upon another haunted island. Once spelled enough for him; and there was no telling but that on another occasion the ghost might prove to be more real than the one manufactured by Glenwood and his fellow smugglers, to frighten the owners of the three motor boats away from their pet cove.

There was always the chance that sooner or later they would again run across Clarence Macklin and his crony, Bully Joe Brinker. George would be only too glad of another opportunity to test his beloved *Wireless* against the very best that the *Flash* could put forth.

"Make up your mind, George," said Jack, when his chum was mentioning this thing one day. "You never would get that tricky Clarence to acknowledge your boat to be better than his. If you beat him six times he'd have six good excuses ready, and each one different from all the rest. Whoever caught him with

the goods on, and made him confess? A fellow he didn't know stopped him and stuck the things in his pocket. He was right then on the way to hand them over to the police. Don't you remember when he said that? Well, you may have your race, and win out handsomely, but don't expect Clarence to hand you an honest admission that his boat ran second."

"I don't," grinned George; "but I'd like to race him all the same; and I only hope the chance comes along, sooner or later."

Perhaps it would, for stranger things were likely to happen to the motor boat boys than that they would run across Clarence again during their outing days.

"I saw him in Clayton when ashore," remarked Jack. "He was talking with a man who, from his soiled clothes, I'd take to be an engineer, or something like that."

"Sure," laughed George, evidently pleased. "Knowing that in her present condition the *Flash* is no match for my bully boat, he's going to see if she can't be improved somehow, so as to squeeze just a little more speed out of her. Huh! perhaps I might do something of that kind myself. But just wait and see, fellows. If there is another race between us it's going to be for keeps."

When some time later their mail began to arrive from home it might be judged from the excitement and congratulations to be heard that favorable replies were coming in from headquarters. And that this was really the fact, the reader who has been interested in the fortunes of Jack and his chums thus far, will take for granted, when he learns that the title of the next volume in this series, already published, and ready for his enjoyment, is: "The Motor Boat Boys on the Great Lakes; or, Young Pilots to the Rescue."

THE END.

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